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COMIC World

JULY 1993

ISSUE NO 17

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So everyone else is outside enjoying the sunshine and I'm stuck indoors trying to pull this issue together a week early so you can enjoy your trading cards, you lucky, lucky people. But, if I'm honest, I'm really pleased with the way this issue has come together: it's brighter and better than ever before, so packed with goodies that we had to drop the letters page and hold over some great features until next month.

If we've tempted you in with our cunning marketing, we know you're in for a treat. If you're new to this start here.

In the past comics have been called lots of things – The Funny Papers was always a favourite. "Kids stuff" is how most people describe them, because comics have traditionally been seen as kids entertainment. Everyone remember comics – Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman (who put the 'her' in hero), Spider-Man, the X-Men . . . the list is endless. They're still here, entertaining generation after generation, big, colourful action heroes whose stories push the limits of imagination. You can loose yourself in them for hours.

But wait, there's a darker side to comics, anti-heroes, the snarling, grim avengers; there's horror lurking in the shadows, beckoning, enticing; there's beauty and there's the beast. And for every dark side there's a lighter side to balance, funny, satirical, scathing. Anything is possible in comics, and in 1993 there's a comic for you, whatever your tastes. No other medium can offer you so much diversity, because in comics there are no limits!

That's where Comic World comes in. In the last eighteen months, we've highlighted some of the most talented artists and writers in the world: interviews, features, reviews, news. And we're going to be doing the same for the next eighteen months, and the eighteen months after that: this month we've got the lowdown on Valiant's autumn line-up, an exclusive interview with Dave Gibbons, a preview of *War Machine* and the new Frontier line. Next month we'll be featuring *Jurassic Park*, Spielberg's latest multi-million dollar epic, and look at the new *2000AD*, home of Judge Dredd, an interview with Jim Shooter whose Defiant Comics are about to set the world of comics alight, news on the new *X–Men 2099*, and there's going to be a lot more. In the next couple of months we've features about the rebirth of Superman, the new Batman, a look at the new Red Dwarf series, and interviews with some of the biggest names in the field.

Stick around: this is comics. There are no limits and we're going where no magazine has gone before! Don't get left behind.

Steve

Contributors: Paul Birch, Neil Cooper, Dave Dickson, Colin Greenland, Phil Hall, Richard Hill, Richard Hudson, Alan Porter, Lance Rickman, Bill Storie, Rick Vance, Alan Woollcombe.

Cover: Dave Gibbons provides a stunning portrait of Martha Washington, heroine of *Give Me Liberty* and the incoming *War Diaries*; Martha is © Frank Miller & Dave Gibbons and used by permission. And you can't have missed your free pack of *Steve Jackson's Battlecards*: Scratch & Slaughter with the compliments of Merlin Publishing & *Comic World!*

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Editor: Steve Holland
Phone: 0206 576490
Fax: 0206 564214

Advertising Manager: Corinne Bradd
Phone: 0206 563616
Fax: 0206 571607

Group Editor: Matt Tudor
Phone: 0206 564490

Group Advertising Manager: Martin Lack
Phone: 0206 571385

Promotions/Subscriptions: Helen Stuttle
Phone: 0206 578470

Administration/Accounts:
Phone: 0206 540327

Design: Graham Baldock
Phone: 071 490 2761

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COMIC World NEWS

AZRAEL FACES BANE IN KNIGHTFALL CLIMAX

The Knightfall *storyline reaches a thunderous climax in* Batman #500, *a 64-page landmark special, which will feature the most dramatic events in the life of Bruce Wayne since the first night he donned the Batman costume and took to the streets of Gotham City. This most startling change of direction in 50 years began in* Batman #492, *and has twisted through the Batman titles* Batman *and* Detective Comics *since, the impact of the storyline growing as fans realised how big a change was in store. Grievously injured at the hands of the drug-enhanced criminal mastermind, Bane in* Batman #497, *Bruce Wayne's mantle as the Dark Knight is taken over and it falls to Jean Paul Valley, Azrael, in a newly designed costume to bring the Bane storyline to a crescendo.*

Bane, the psychotic, drug-enhanced villain introduced in **Vengeance of Bane**, released 30 of Batman's most dangerous enemies from Arkham Asylum to wreak havoc on the streets of Gotham, wearing the Dark Knight down as he battles villain after supervillain until, at the point of total exhaustion, Bane finally faces him.

Doug Moench is the writer for what promises to be the best-selling title of the month, with the first half of the book drawn by Jim Aparo and inked by Terry Austin, the second half by Mike Manley, who will be taking over the regular handling of the title. *Batman #500* ships August 10, a collectors edition priced $3.95 featuring a die-cut overcover on a foil-enhanced cover pencilled by Quesada; the $2.50 newsstand edition has a cover by Kelley Jones.

SPOILER WARNING: This news item contains information on the ending of the Knightfall storyline.

O'NEIL ON KNIGHTFALL

"Not since the death of Robin have I been so involved in something that has generated so much interest," exclaims Denny O'Neil, editor of DC's Batman titles. Not even a cross-Atlantic telephone line can dampen the enthusiasm in his voice. "I'm surprised at the reaction; its been overwhelming. We've had to go back to press with a few issues because people didn't realise there was anything special going on and we've just reprinted the Azrael mini-series as a book a couple of months early. The sales are about six times what I'm used to seeing for trade paperback reprints."

Sword of Azrael, shipping on June 22, was the opening shot in the build-up to the 'Knightfall' storyline, although few people realised how important Jean Paul Valley was going to be to the Batman continuity at the time; "Nobody seemed to pay attention to it," says O'Neil. "We thought it was a good commercial series, and it didn't do badly, but the reception was disappointing, maybe because there was so much stuff out that summer." The series has had a belated surge of interest, firstly as word of mouth hooked new fans to Joe Quesada's stunning artwork, then as news of the implications of 'Knightfall' began to filter through.

The background to the terrible drug which created Bane was told in **Legends of the Dark Knight #16-20: Venom**, which will be collected as a trade paperback shipping August 17.

The future of Bruce Wayne and Batman will unfold through two spin-off storylines: "With issue 500 the Bane storyline pretty much gets resolved through the agency of Azrael who, in effect, becomes Batman; there will be a change of costume designed by Joe Quesada. Meanwhile, Bruce Wayne will be off on his own because somebody has kidnapped Robin's father and Shondra Kinsolving, the woman doctor who has been treating Bruce. It's a motiveless kidnapping which only the world's greatest detective, even wheelchair-bound, will have a chance of solving. So he attempts to solve it, through three different books: it will start with a two-issue story in **Justice League Task Force** *(beginning in #5)* three issues of **Shadow of the Bat** and finally wrap up in **Legends of the Dark Knight.**"

Entitled **'Knightquest: The Search'**, O'Neil himself will be writing the first and third parts, with Alan Grant writing the *Shadow* arc.

The second storyline will be **'Knightquest: Crusade'**: "Azrael, back in Gotham City, is dealing with crime there but also dealing with himself because he doesn't know what he's capable of. He's much more the avenger." Trained as an assassin since childhood, Azrael has a completely different set of values to Wayne, explored through the pages of **Detective Comics #667** and **Batman: Shadow of the Bat #19.**

The response to the series has been something of a surprise to O'Neil, who felt that 'Knightfall' risked being overshadowed by other events in the DC universe: "Mike (Carlin) and I didn't consult, so I didn't know that he was going to do the Death of Superman and he didn't know what I was doing. I thought since Superman was out there first nobody would notice Batman. It's the second time I've been wrong in six months: we did **Batman: Seduction of the Gun**, the anti-handgun piece which came out exactly at the same time of the Superman story was breaking." Response to the one-shot generated a lot of argument, but culminated in both O'Neil and writer John Ostrander being invited by the governor of Virginia to a ceremony where tougher new anti-gun laws were signed.

2000AD SUMMER OFFENSIVE

Beginning with Prog 842, **2000AD** launches their Summer Offensive, provoked, according to editor Alan McKenzie, by remarks made in the trade press by a veteran comic creator who "was holding forth and having a rant about how none of the new, young comic creators create comics worth a damn." The comments galvanised Grant Morrison, Mark Miller and John Smith to prove their abilities and create an all new line-up of characters. The four new creations include 'Maniac 5' by Miller & Steve Yeowell: "although he looks like a robot he's actually a remote controlled battle suit, so dangerous he's almost a doomsday machine," according to McKenzie. "The last time Maniac 5 was activated he almost destroyed the world. Now there's a threat so dire that the president reactivates him." The threat is an alien invasion, and if you're wondering what happened to Maniacs 1-4, you can find out in 'Maniac 5 War Journal', a sort of prequel which appears in the **2000AD Sci-Fi Special** revealing how Maniac 4 went irreversibly insane.

'Really & Truly' is Grant Morrison's *Thelma and Louise* for the *2000AD* generation, "a road movie, babes with big guns and bad attitudes," with art by Rian Hughes. "Really & Truly are two females on a massive trek across America, meeting up with some weird characters. Where Maniac 5 is an adventure strip this is good fun, essentially a comedy strip.

"Then there's 'Slaughterbowl' by John Smith & a relatively new artist called Paul Peart, a game show of the future in which felons battle cybernetically enhanced dinosaurs in an arena."

Last, and in no way least, comes Big Dave. A reaction to the British tabloid press, Big Dave is the ultimate *Sun* reader: "He hasn't got one redeeming feature whatsoever. I should stress that he doesn't represent *2000AD* editorially or speak for any of his creators. He embodies every stupidity of that peculiar member of the British public who cheered the ghastly jingoism of the Falklands War like the GOTCHA! headlines; he's a completely bigoted, foul-mouthed xenophobe.

"In the first story Big Dave is hired by the Tory government to go and sort out Sadam Hussein and beat up the towel-heads, accompanied by a special envoy. The second story is called 'Monarchy in the UK' where Big Dave uncovers a hideous plot to overthrow the Royal Family from within." Steve Parkhouse is the artist working from the Morrison & Miller script.

Judge Dredd is the only old-timer in the new line-up, but again is given the Morrison treatment: 'Inferno' follows on from the current 'Purgatory' storyline by Miller & Carlos Ezquerra, with ex-Judge Grice escaping from Titan and returning to Earth intent on killing Dredd.

The **2000AD Sci-Fi Special** for 1993 should be on sale now, containing a Rogue Trooper story by John Smith & Chris Weston, who will be the new regular RT artist, Bix Barton by Pete Milligan & Jim McCarthy, Brigand Doom by Alan McKenzie & Dave D'Antiquis, a Tyranny Rex text story by John Smith, Maniac 5 by Mark Miller & David Hine (see above), Strontium Dogs by Igor Goldkind, Jon Beeston & Colin MacNeil, plus a Dredd reprint and a cover by Dermot Power.

Continued over

CHARTS

1	(1)	**X-Men 23** (Marvel)
2	(2)	**Uncanny X-Men 303** (Marvel)
3	(5)	**X-Force 25** (Marvel)
4	(4)	**Spawn 14** (Image)
5	(3)	**X-Factor 93** (Marvel)
6	(6)	**Sandman 52** (DC)
7	(–)	**Deathmate: Prologue** (Image)
8	(–)	**Sabretooth 1** (Marvel)
9	(–)	**Venom: Funeral Pyre 1** (Marvel)
10	(–)	**Cyberforce #0** (Image)
11	(8)	**Cable 4** (Marvel)
12	(10)	**Spider-Man 2099 10** (Marvel)
13	(–)	**Deadpool 1** (Marvel)
14	(9)	**Deathblow 3** (Image)
15	(–)	**Spider-Man Unlimited 2** (Marvel)
16	(–)	**Batman/Grendal 1: Devil's Riddle** (DC)
17	(–)	**Batman 498** (DC)
18	(11)	**Infinity Crusade 3** (Marvel)
19	(16)	**Amazing Spider-Man 380** (Marvel)
20	(–)	**Batman/Grendal 2: Devil's Masque** (DC)
21	(17)	**Wolverine 72** (Marvel)
22	(18)	**Legends of the Dark Knight 48** (DC)
23	(15)	**Excalibur 68** (Marvel)
24	(18)	**Legends of the Dark Knight 49** (DC)
25	(–)	**Vertigo Jam 1** (DC)
26	(–)	**Detective Comics 665** (DC)
27	(–)	**Savage Dragon 1** (Image)
28	(20)	**Hellblazer 68** (DC)
29	(19)	**Spider-Man 37** (Marvel)
30	(27)	**The Maxx 4** (Image)

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SUPERMAN REBORN

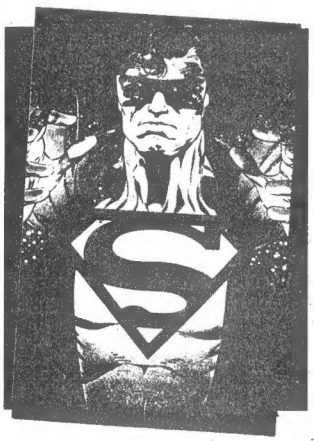
As if Batman's rebirth wasn't enough for August, DC are also promising to reveal the identity of the one, true Superman at the conclusion of the 'Reign of the Supermen' storyline. To be seen in the pages of Superman #82 **and** Adventures of Superman #505, **shipping August 24 and 31 respectively.**

As the tension builds, Superman editor Mike Carlin is sitting tight on who will be revealed as the real Superman. He told *Comic World*: "We've had a great reaction, getting better every day. The fans are picking their favourite, which is what the story is all about." Will fan reaction sway the storyline? "That's already been worked out. We can always make a last minute change; right now we're writing and drawing the story - so get your letters in quick!"

Carlin cryptically mentions that there's a chance that none of the four contenders may be the real Man of Steel.

As tension builds, Coast City (the home of Green Lantern) is destroyed. Atop the ruins, the alien conqueror Mongul has erected his Engine City, a nightmare of technology with which he intends to make Earth the new Warworld. The four Supermen join forces to invade Mongul's stronghold in **Superman: Man of Steel #26**; Hal Jordan joins the fight in **Green Lantern #46**, as the Superman alliance begins to unravel.

The battle reaches its climax in **Superman #82**, written and pencilled by Dan Jurgens, with inks by Brett Breeding, a special collector's edition featuring a chromium cover, 32-pages, no ads and a price of $3.50; the news-stand edition has ads, expanding to 40-pages, priced $2.00.



Superman returns to Metropolis and to Lois in **Adventures of Superman #505**, aided by Karl Kesel, Tom Grummett, Doug Hazlewood and a holographic cover. The collectors edition is priced $2.50, the newsstand edition at $1.50.

The ramifications of Superman's return are explored and the fates of the remaining Supermen considered in **Action Comics #692** on September 7.

STALLONE JOINS DREDD MOVIE

Sylvester Stallone announced during his visit to Britain in May that he had signed up to appear in **Judge Dredd: The Movie**, although it is still not clear whether he will be playing Dredd or a villain.

Stallone, 45, was in the UK to promote the opening of Planet Hollywood in London's West End on May 18, and the opening of his latest movie, **Cliffhanger**. The announcement was made on the BBC's Pebble Mill programme during an interview, Stallone saying that he would be working on the movie after the completion of **Demolition Man**. With Stallone quickly moving onto Cannes with his agent, no further news was available as we went to press, although a statement is expected shortly.

STAN LEE AND MARVEL MOVIES

In what virtually amounts to an apology in advance for the forthcoming Fantastic Four movie, Stan Lee has revealed that Marvel have spent the last three years buying back film options and licenses taken out on their characters. In the past, movie adaptations of Spider-Man, Captain America and Howard the Duck have turned into embarrassing failures, prompting Stan the Man to explain "why The House of Ideas has occasionally seemed more like The Fortress of Flops when it comes to the big screen."

The problem, as Lee sees it, is the lack of Marvel input into any of the films, the solution: more Marvel input in the future. The first example of Lee's creative input statement is **X-Men Animated**, which has proved a smash hit from Fox (who also handle the Batman Animated series), although early reports of the show bemoaned the low quality of animation and much of it was worked over before screening could begin. On the live-action front, Columbia Pictures have, says Lee, developed a "sensational script for a big-budget, big-time Black Panther movie, with Wesley (Passenger 57) Snipes targeted to play the ruler of Wakanda. We've worked closely with Columbia on every phase of this film's development, just as we're working closely with Jim Cameron, Oliver Stone, Wes Craven and other Hollywood heavyweights on a number of other important comic book-based projects."

Principal photography on **Fantastic Four** finished on schedule at the end of January, and has actually received some good word-of-mouth reports from Hollywood; it co-stars another Marvel character, Dr. Doom.

July sees the Stan Lee-created **Rift World** series launched by Roc Science Fiction, a series of novels based on the premise that a rift exists between our world and a world ruled by superheroes. Soon after the discovery by a writer at Fantasy Factory Comics, heroes like The Incredible Rodent, The Ever-Petulant Lump and The Insolvent Interferers start to pour through. Bill McCay pens the first novel in the series, *Crossover*.

TRIAL OF VENOM DESTROYED

The **Spider-Man: Trial of Venom** which is causing a backlash of complaint from fans as dealers cash in on its scarcity without a thought to the original aim of the charity comic, to raise money for UNICEF, may be set to switch price again with the news that 60,000 copies of the 200,000 copy print run were destroyed to honour Marvel's word that no copies would be available from any other source. Only 160,000 were ordered from UNICEF at $5.00, which may indicate a cooling in the collectability of Spider-Man, and the £20 price tag seen here recently must surely be inflated.

OBITUARIES

Further to last month's report on the death of Brandon Lee, it now appears that Lee was accidentally shot with a .44 Magnum. Whilst filming close-ups the previous day, dummy bullets had been put in the gun; when the gun was unloaded a bullet remained in the chamber. The following day, March 31, when Lee's character was to be killed by actor Michael Massee the gun was loaded with blanks, Lee carrying a grocery bag fitted with a squib to simulate the bullet. On cue, Massee 'shot' Lee, the squib went off, and it was only when the scene ended that anyone realised something was wrong, the blank charge firing the bullet into Lee's body and spine.

The $14 million production of James O'Barr's *The Crow* has been plagued by incidents, including a carpenter being severely burned by a live power line and the sets being destroyed by a storm. At the time of Lee's death there was no weapons supervisor on set, the notoriously cheap Carolco Studios employing non-union labour thereby avoiding union safety rules.

ALBERTO GIOLITTI

Alberto Giolitti, one of Italy's finest comic strip artists, died recently. Born in Rome on Novemnber 14, 1923, Giolitti studied architecture at the University of Rome. His career in comics began at the age of 14 with contributions to the Italian magazine *Il Vittorioso*, and in movies as a set designer in the 1940s. Giolitti moved to Buenos Aires in 1946 where for worked for Editorial Lainez and Columbia Hermanos, and then to New York where he worked for Dell/Western Publishing on such comics as *Sergeant Preston*, *Indian Chief*, *Tonto*, *Gunsmoke*, etc.; he moved back to Italy in 1960 to set up the Studio Giolitti, but continued to produce many strips, ranging from *Star Trek* and *Turok, Son of Stone* to *Twilight Zone* and *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*. His association with the Gold Key line ended only when the line folded in 1984.

Studio Giolitti supplied countless humour and adventure strips throughout Europe and America, particularly to Britain and Germany: Massimo Bellardinelli, who went on to make his mark in *2000AD*, was Giolitti's background artist for many years. During the 1960s Giolitti himself drew western, adventure and girls' strips for British comics, including "Sword For Hire" in *Hurricane*, "Blood on the Prairie" in *Ranger*, "The Fiery Furnaces" in *Tiger*, and "Enchanted Isle" for *Tammy*, amongst many others.

ELIZABETH MARSDEN

Elizabeth Holloway Marsden died on March 27 in Bethel, Conn. at the age of 100. Mrs. Marsden was the wife of William Moulton Marsden, the psychologist who created Wonder Woman in 1941. William Marsden, who also invented the polygraph (lie-detector), introduced Wonder Woman to *All-Star Comics #8* at the insistence of his wife who felt there were too many men in comicbooks, urging her husband to "create a Superwoman".

BRITISH NEWS

SILVER AGE MEGAZINE

To celebrate their Best Ongoing Publication Award at the 1993 Glasgow convention, the Judge Dredd Megazine **features a fifth colour - silver - cover on issue 31, a bumper all-strip issue. #30, on sale June 12, features the climax of 'A Game of Dolls', a one-off Dredd story by John Smith & newcomer David Milgate, and a complete 'Missionary Man' adventure; all make way for four new stories in #31, on sale June 26, alongside the continuing Anderson Psi Division story, 'Childhood's End': 'Brit-Cit Brute' is the story of the angriest man in Brit-Cit, a one-man demolition squad whose boss Judge Major, wants him to adopt a kinder, gentler image. Mayhem follows, provided by Robbie Morrison & Nick Percival; 'Armitage: Flashback II', a three-parter by David Stone & Charlie Adlard (Spotlighted this issue!) digs deeper into the origins of Brit-Cit's best judge with a exploration**

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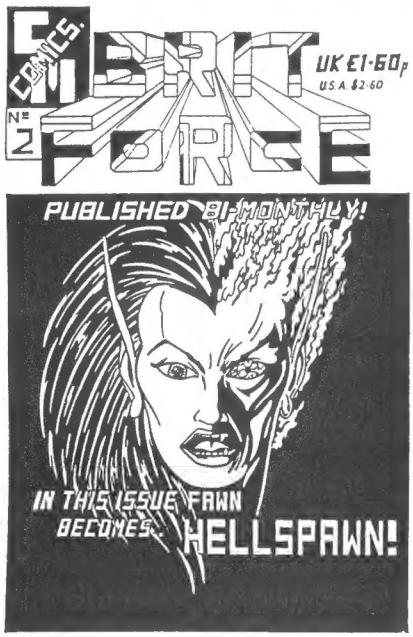
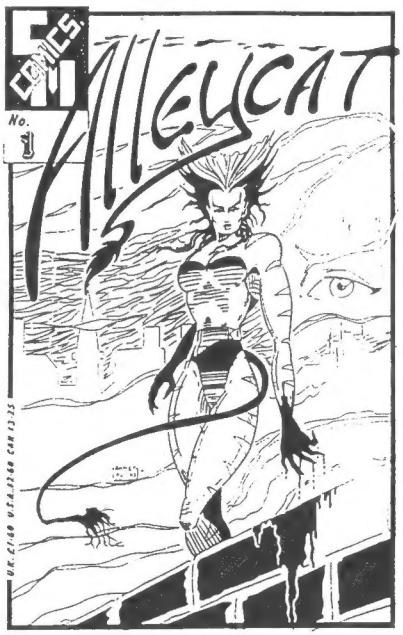
BRIT FORCE 2 is on sale now. Featuring a New Colour, Glossy Card Cover. In September **BRIT FORCE 3** will be on sale with the comic increasing to a 32 pager. At the same time **ALLEYCAT 1** will debut as the first of the new titles from **C.M. COMICS** with **AHMET ALI** handling the pencilling.





BRIT FORCE 4 will be published in October and will be the first issue of the comic's new monthly status. There will be an 8 page solo story on **BULLDOG** written by **JOHN GATEHOUSE** with an as yet unappointed guest artist. The lead story will introduce **THE WILDCARD** team, pencilled by newcomer **KELVIN COX** who will be making this team his own.

FROM OCTOBER '93 THERE WILL BE 5 NEW TITLES LAUNCHED BY C.M. COMICS

WILDCARD – **KELVIN COX** will be drawing this series featuring **BLOODSPORT, GOLDEN SHOT, KNIFE EDGE** and **MOLTEN RAIN**. Super-Human Syntho Warriors.

HOLOCAUST – The solo adventures of **BRIT FORCE** member **STONEHENGE**, as illustrated by **MARK DUNN** who will also be pencilling **BRIT FORCE 5**.

SCYTHE – A super-hero with a twist, written by **SAM JOHNSON.**

DEATHSHEART, a second chance at life for the new super heroine, as written by **GARY SMITH** with artwork by **ANDREW RADBOURNE**, guest artist on **BRIT FORCE 6**.

The regular **BRIT FORCE** series will highlight the talents of 4 new artists from issues 4 to 7. **BRIT FORCE 7** sees the work of **RUSSELL LEACH.**

STRAY DOGS – written by **JOHN GATEHOUSE**, author of 'THE WAY TO WRITE COMICS' published by Penguin books, and starring a team of super powered mercenaries. JOHN is quite a veteran in the comics field.

People are always bemoaning the fact that Britain doesn't have a super hero universe of its own. Well now it does! So **PLEASE** support it!

Customers, retailers and distributors lend me your ears, contact: **CHRIS MORGAN** at **C.M. COMICS c/o 29 LARCH ROAD, MAYBUSH, SOUTHAMPTON, HAMPSHIRE SO1 6ES or telephone: (0703) 781934.**

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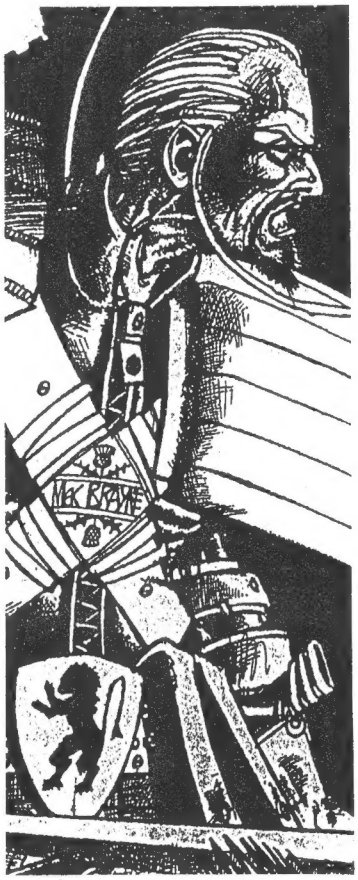

of his time during the Civil War. The story also features Gabriel who will be reappearing in the next Armitage epic, 'City of the Dead'. A new Calhab Justice tale introduces new artist, Lol, from a script by Jim Alexander. Can Ed McBrayne save Scotland from meltdown when terrorists attack 'Dounreay'? And John Wagner returns to Judge Dredd in a complete story, 'The Hottie House Siege', inspired by the recent events in Waco, completed before the siege ended, but chillingly accurate . . . newcomer Steve Brown provides art for the confrontation with Branch Moronia, the dumbest sect in Mega-City One!

Issue 32, on sale July 10, contains more of the same, Wagner signing another Dredd one-off, 'The Al Capone Story' with artist Jim Vickers; Anderson, Brit-Cit Brute, Calhab Justice and Armitage continue.

Megazine editor David Bishop takes control of the Complete Judge Dredd with issue 17 (on sale now) which features an original Mike McMahon cover. McMahon makes it a double with a 'Fink' cover for #18.

UK NEWSBRIEF

ATOMEKA

Scheduled for July is *Bisley's Scrapbook*, a collection of Simon Bisley stories and pin-ups including 'Max Carnage' (from *Heavy Metal War Machine*), 'Kyrn' (from ditto, but originally in *A1*) and 'The Corpse With No Name' from *Toxic!*.

***Hugo Tate: O, America*, reprints Nick Abadzis' *Deadline* strip as Hugo sets off across America in a 96 page softcover. One of the best received stories in *Deadline*.**

Doc Stern, the lovable Mr. Monster, discovers Hitler's diary and it seems Hitler's brain is alive and well on Mars. *Mr. Monster vs the Nazis from Mars* is the result, told in 48 colour pages by Michael T. Gilbert & George Freeman.

***Strange Embrace #3* (of 4) is also scheduled, David Hine's dark bi-monthly examination of the mind of Anthony Corbeau and the suicide and self-mutilation of Sarah Corbeau.**

DARK HORSE

Dark Horse will be producing a British news-stand version of Topps' **Jurassic Park** film adaptation, written by Walt Simonson and drawn by Gil Kane & George Perez. The first issue (of 4) goes on sale July 8, priced 95p, and will include extra features and photos on the making of the movie.

Aliens #13 sees the first episode of the all-new 'Aliens: Crusade' by Michael Cook & Christian Gorny, set in post-*Earth War* London where mercenaries have been sent to find out why the city has remained free of Aliens.

Star Wars #10 begins a new 'Tale of the Jedi', **Dracula #7** continues the line-up of 'Vlad the Impaler' and 'Vampirella', **Total Carnage #4** has an 'Army of Darkness' cover to tie-in with the film release, and the new **Manga Mania** should now be on the stands.

KNOCKABOUT

The fourth Fanny anthology, **Dyke's Delight**, is released in June, edited by Kate Charlsworth and featuring strips and cartoons by Grizelda Grislingham, Jo Nesbitt, Lucy Byatt, Jeremy Dennis, Roberta Gregory, Jennifer Camper, Angela Martin & Annie Lawson amongst others.

MARVEL

Overkill gets a new look from #30, on sale now, as 'Black Axe' and 'Super Soldiers' join Death's Head and Warheads in the line-up. Over the next few months expect to see more new material, especially commissioned for the title, such as 'Knuckledown' by Craig Houston & Carl Critchlow, whose covers have graced recent issues.

Gene Pool is the latest group of titles to be released by Marvel, due for release in August. **Gene Dogs** is a 4-issue mini-series written by John Freeman with pencils by Dave Taylor, an untrained group with genetically boosted powers formed to counter the increasing devastation caused by MyS-TECH.

Gun Runner is a 6-issue series by Dan Abnett & Andy Lanning, with pencils by another newcomer, Terry Clark, starring one of the Enhanced, created for an ancient alien war against the Cynodd; they win and Gun Runner is put into suspended animation, only to wake on Earth where the Cynodd are rising again.

Codename: Genetix reform for a 6-issue series by Graham Marks & Andy Lanning, with pencils by Phil Gascoine; the team have escaped the clutches of MyS-TECH, only to discover that another similar team exists, and the existence of a project named Cradle which will supply MyS-TECH with an endless source of genetic mutations.

Dark Guard is an ongoing title by Dan Abnett & newcomer Carlos Pacheco as The Time Guardian kidnaps the best fighters from Earth to battle MyS-TECH to form a reluctant alliance from Death's Head II, Dark Angel, Colonel Liger, Stacey from Warheads, Motormouth, Killpower & Albion, plus Ultra-Marine a super-soldier from the far future. One of 'em dies in the first issue.

MBS PUBLISHING

Mindbenders #2 goes on sale in July, featuring 152 pages, 12 of them in colour, part two of each of the serialised stories with artwork by Bob Wakelin, David Pugh, Ron Tiner, Eric Bradbury, Dean Willets, Colin Stanford, Paul Scott, and newcomer John Beeston.

PENGUIN

Murmer by Mattotti & Kramski is released on June 24, a 56-page softcover priced at £8.99.

COMIC BOOK POSTAL AUCTIONS

The third CBP auction is to be held on June 23; if you require a catalogue – which is offering **The Amazing Spider-Man #s 1** and **2** amongst its lots – contact Malcolm Phillips, 40–42 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 3ND, or telephone 071 586 3007. It's free.

COMICS CREATORS GUILD

The **Take Comics Seriously** leaflet costs £1 plus an SAE from Flat 4, 394 Streatham High Road, London SW16 6HX. The June 23 meeting includes guest Dave Elliott from Atomeka; on July 30 its Carol Bennett talking about the Fanny co-operative. Memberships details from Howard Stangroom, 52 Dunedin Road, Leyton, London E10.

FIRST OUT

The First Out Cafe & Bar at 52 St. Giles High Street, London WC2 presents two exhibitions in June, the first by French artist Florence Debray of 25 banknotes onto which she has painted humorous depictions of known or fictitious lesbians; the second is an exhibition put together by Don Melia before his death last August.

INTERNATIONAL CARTOON CONFERENCE

The first International Cartoon Conference on cartooning and cartoon art will be held at the University of Central England in Birmingham on June 21. The conference will take place at the Adrian Boult Hall, part of the Paradise Place complex, beginning at 10.00 am. Speakers and guests include Bill Tidy, Amanda-Jane Doran (of the Punch Archive), Ralph Steadman, Steve Bell, Mel Calman, Charlies Dierick (of the Belgium Centre for Comic Strip Art) and Roger Law from *Spitting Image*. The fee (which includes lunch) is £85.00 (£50 for students); contact Judith Bulbeck, University of Central England in Birmingham, Perry Barr, Birmingham B42 2SU (021 331 5575).

K-9 BOOKS

K-9 Books is a new shop opening its doors soon. Run by David Barber, it will specialise in Dr. Who merchandise; Barber, a big fan of the series, told us: "Over the years I've been involved in Science Fiction/ Fantasy and Comics, I've found Dr. Who to be the most consistant factor...in a sense we hope that K-9 Books will endevour to continue and even to some degree replace what has been lost over the years. We don't want to be just another shop where collectors hand over their coffers and say goodbye – all fans are welcome to come and discuss the things they like or dislike, chat or whatever. K-9 is not an epitaph to what has been, but a ray of hope to all fans to what will be. We're not excluding any suggestions or ideas from fans regarding what they would like to see..."

The official opening should have a guest celebrity – but David's keeping Who it is under wraps!

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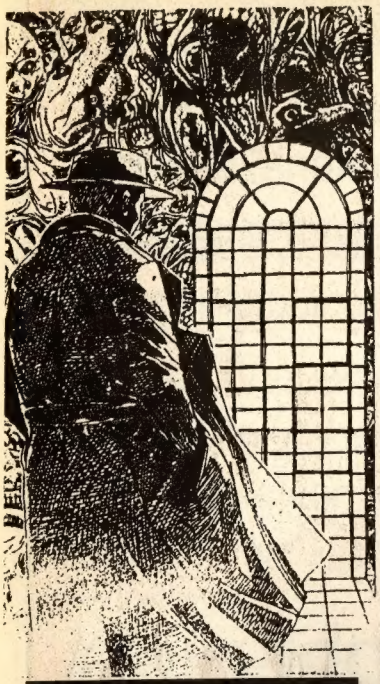

DC NEWS

PHANTOM – STRANGER STILL

At the crossroad's of everyone's lives, a stranger waits, serving an unguessable power and ready to guide humanity through its crucial turning points. It's at such a junction that the second* Vertigo Visions *64-page one-shot, shipping August 31,* The Phantom Stranger *begins. Written by novelist Alisa Kwitney and illustrated by Guy* (Sandman Mystery Theatre) *Davis, it tells the story of Naomi and her bizarre experiences working at a diabolic nursing home. The home's disturbing and decrepit residents are desperate to leave, and want Naomi's help to escape their prison, one of the prisoners a

withered old man claiming to be the human half of the Phantom Stranger.

Also off the Vertigo racks comes the **Hellblazer Special #1**, written by Garth Ennis and drawn by Steve Dillon, as the past comes back to haunt John Constantine with a vengeance, triggered by a close encounter with a murderer. Fate is pulling him closer to a confrontation with the First of the Fallen. The special, shipping September 7, also includes pin-ups by Richard Case, Glenn Fabry, David Lloyd, Steve Pugh, Will Simpson, Charles Vess, Phil Winslade and others.

ROUND-UP

Metal Men is a 4-issue mini-series shipping September 7, reviving the classic DC character, written and illustrated by the *Superman #75* team of Mike Carlin, Dan Jurgens & Brett Breeding. When a meteor crashes on Earth, Dr. Will Magnus deploys his robotic creations to retrieve it, but there are others who won't hesitate to destroy Magnus to get the meteor themselves. At the same time, the Metal Men confront a startling secret which challenges everything they ever understood about their origin.

The long-awaited **Streets** mini-series by James Hudnall is rescheduled for August 24, the first issue painted by John Estes.

Batman: Legends of the Dark Night #52 is written by Alan Grant with art by *Comic World* poll-winner, Arthur Ranson, the first of a two-parter entitled 'Tao'. Gang-war breaks out in Gotham's Chinatown bringing Batman into conflict with a mystical martial arts assassin, Dragon. *Legends* is on a bi-weekly run, shipping August 17 & 31.

Artists Adam Hughes & Mark Farmer guest in **Legionnaires #7**, a self-contained story about missing Atlanteans - or were they murdered?

More guest artists: Glyn Dillon & Philip Bond guest on **Shade the Changing Man #40** where Shade is surrounded by shrieking pillows as beds at the Hotel Shade give up their dark, cryptic secrets. It says here.

Garth Ennis takes over the writing of **The Demon** with #40, with 'Troubled Souls' artist John McCrea making it a double, as they often do. A biker summons up a demon to desecrate some holy ground and raise some hell – the new darker Demon has other ideas.

Mike *(Madman)* Allred illustrates the bulk of **Sandman #54** by Neil Gaiman, with a framing sequence by Bryan Talbot & Mark Buckingham.

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MARVEL NEWS

of the year, **X-Men 2099**. The creators on the title are John Francis Moore (currently writing *Doom 2099*), with art by Ron Lim & Adam Kubert. It ships August 17 and we'll have more news for you next month.

ROUND-UP

The new horror line masterminded by Clive Barker (exclusively revealed way back in *CW #9*) debuts in July, each title featuring a prismatic foil cover. You can see what's in store by checking out the 75¢ sampler, **Razorline: The First Cut** on July 6, featuring 5 page preview stories for each of the four titles, *Hyperkind*, *Ectokid*, *Hokum & Hex* and *Saint Sinner*. **Hyperkind**, shipping July 13, by Fred Burke, Paris Cullins & Bob Petrecca, are a contemporary superhero team whose powers are inherited from Paxis, a team the world has forgotten; **Ectokid**, shipping July 20, by James Robinson, Steve Skroce & Bob Dvorak, features Dex Mungo, who can pass through the borders between the real world and the Ectosphere where the dead live; **Hokum & Hex**, shipping July 27, by Frank Lovece, Anthony Williams & Andy Lanning, in which a failed comedian becomes the Earth's protector; and **Saint Sinner**, shipping August 3, by Elaine Lee & Max Douglas, in which a 16-year-old becomes possessed by an evil spirit, battling it to become the protector of lost souls. Each of the first three presents a five page preview of the next title.

Daredevil/Black Widow: Abattoir, shipping July 13, is a 64-page one-shot graphic novel by Jim Starlin, fully painted by Joe Chiodo: psychopaths are butchering latent telepaths, and it's up to Daredevil and Black Widow to stop them . . . only the psychopaths can read their every thought.

'Road to Vengeance: The Missing Link' is a six-part Ghost Rider/Spirits of Vengeance crossover,

Continued on page 16

X-MEN/AVENGERS 30TH ANNIVERSARY

It's anniversary month for both the X-Men and Avengers. Starting with the latter, **Avengers #366** is a 64-page special featuring a gold foil embossed cover; the main story has the Avengers battling the Kree Strike Force to stop them dropping a Nega-Bomb, whilst a back-up features Blood Wraith and Deadpool. Ships July 20.

One week later, a new four-parter begins in **Avenger: Terminatrix Objective**, in which Thunderstrike, US Agent and War Machine all guest as Terminatrix tries to expand Chronopolis and discovers a shocking secret about time. Mark Gruenwald & Mike Gustovich are the creative team.

Avengers West Coast are only two away from another milestone at #98 as Satannish plots to destroy the AWC.

July 13 sees the **Avengers Marvel Milestone #1**, a reprint of the 1963 debut.

Thor Corps is a 4-issue mini-series by Tom DeFalco & Pat Oliffe in which Dargo recruits other members of the Corps to battle his greatest enemy, Demonstaff, in a clash that may alter the timestream for all eternity.

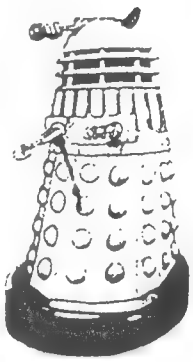
Meanwhile, over **Uncanny X-Men #304**, 'Fatal Attractions' reaches part 3, a 64-page spectacular with a wraparound cover, and polaroid hologram cover. Scott Lobdell & John Romita Jr. gather members from X-Men, X-Factor, X-Force and Excalibur to bury a friend – and Magneto chooses that moment to return. Then, one of their own turns against them!

The **X-Men Anniversary Magazine** is a 48-page colour mag shipping July 6 looking at the X-Men/Avengers crossover, reminiscences by Stan Lee, Chris Claremont, Roy Thomas and others, plus behind the scenes features.

Marvel are touting it as the launch

Made in Heaven Present

VERY WELL ATTENDED FAIR



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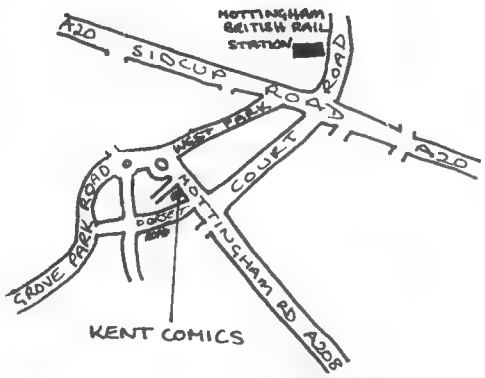

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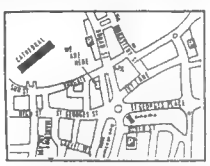

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CHARLIE ADLARD

Some secrets are just too good to keep. Take Charlie Adlard, for instance: a quiet interview turns into a small gathering as Charlie shows off his latest work, a 16 page Judge Hershey/Treasure Steel cross-over which he dashed off whilst waiting for the next script to *Dances With Demons*. The strip oozes tension from every line. Everyone who sees it says nice things. Some things, you see, really need to be made public.

David Stone offers an impromptu compliment, describing Charlie as the best new artist the *Judge Dredd Megazine* has had in a long time, David Bishop later tells me he's sure Charlie is challenging Sean Phillips for the speed and reliability award. Michael Bennent thinks he's a major new talent.

We settle down to enjoy some of Glasgow's finest hospitality and a meandering conversation as people ebb and flow from the knot of admirers around our table. Adlard has a fondness for Glasgow: "I've been up here every convention," he says between sips of orange juice: "It was here two years ago that I got my first contract with Fleetway from Steve McManus. I was here on my own for the first two years trying to get work, approaching people, and luckily I had some Dredd samples that Steve liked. I was given a Dredd one-off, and David Bishop immediately put me onto 'Armitage 2', with my failed version of Devlin Waugh in between."

This version of the C.V. omits the two years of odd jobs, time as a drummer in a band, the rejection from the *Beano*, the cuddly animal strips...perhaps some things should be kept secret after all. But the failed Devlin?

"Basically, John Smith always had Sean Phillips in mind, and Sean wasn't available at the time, and David asked me if I'd do some sample pages. To be honest, I think John was so hooked on having Sean that he really wasn't going to accept anyone else whether it was brilliant or not." As it was, Sean became

available: "Sean did a much better job than I could at the time," Charlie admits, although comparison's were good enough for him to be offered the Brit-Cit detective strip, Armitage, previously painted by Sean, whom Adlard seemed to follow all too regularly.

More recently he's been able to cut his own trail, retaining his links with the *Megazine*, and finding himself a niche with Marvel UK, originally as the artist of *Shadow Riders*, only to be suddenly replaced. Laughing, he explains "It's a long story...it's called going on holiday at the wrong time. They brought the schedule forward and had to get someone elsé in. But they offered me a couple of one-offs, and then Michael came onto the scene, rang me, and offered me *Dances With Demons* with Simon (Jowett)."

Dances, now part of the Marvel Frontier line, concerns James Owl and the mystical powers of the Ghost Dance he has inherited from his grandfather, powers which an evil force, the Manitou, wants: "It starts off with this battle of Indian demons in a New York subway, and the story takes place mostly in sunny California, which is a nice contrast, because you have nice, bright, sunny

California with these dark forces converging – a dark horror story taking place under blue skies.

"Simon has done a lot of research and made it a proper story: it doesn't all explode in the first issue. It builds up."

Adlard was in the enviable position of having exhausted the scripts available shortly before Glasgow and there was a two week break in the offing, just before going on holiday. Hence the Hershey/Steel black 'n' white: "It has a monster called the Degenomancer which, as the name implies, degenerates to a slithering mass of tentacles and melted flesh from a human being. It's quite incredible. Someone said that the artwork looks like the old Quatermass movie." It does, although the setting is a subway, not a cathedral. A different subway.

Another short series, a two-parter, is *Warheads: Black Dawn*, which sees the now freelance Warheads team worm-holing their way to an alternate universe: "The Warheads are trapped in a very dark, menacing, empty New York; they have to wait until the wormhole to open again before they can get back. The alternative Earth is over-run by vampires led by the Vampire Master – it was going to be Morbius, but we couldn't use him. Attacked by vampires, they meet a vampire hunter, who was going to be Ghost Rider but I'm a jinx when it comes to existing Marvel characters; we're never allowed to use them." Even when he's not eventually on the title – even *Shadow Riders* was to have featured Ghost Rider, but...

"One of the Warheads is kidnapped and attacked by the Vampire Master; you could write 'in this issue, one of the Warheads dies' on the cover!

"That sort of brings me up to date. I've a *Black Axe* story arc lined up when I finish *Dances*. I'm on issue 3, but somethings bound to happen because I'm going on holiday on Thursday: I'll get back and somebody will have started it or something..."

After that an 8-page *Dances With Demons* story for the forthcoming *Frontier Unlimited* comic. Planning well ahead (you have to when you work that fast!) Adlard is talking to a non-comicbook publisher in America about a Sherlock Holmes series, and there's *Coward*: "It sounds like a cliche, but it's a superhero satire. It's basically how Hollywood and the media, the promoters, would get behind a superhero – the bloke is a failed actor – good, but failed. He hasn't slept with the right people or been in the right place at the right time. And, of course, he's a complete coward.

"I'm trying to get away from the obvious, clean-lined superhero thing," he says of his artwork. You'll discover the truth of the statement in the forthcoming *Judge Dredd Megazine* 'Armitage Flashback II', continuing the retro-origin of the Brit-Cit judge, due in a couple of weeks time. After that the secret will be out.

CHARLIE ADLARD STRIPOGRAPHY

Biggles Bear (in *Hot Air*, 1989, by Tim Quinn)
Katman (in *People Magazine*, 12 Nov 1989-6 May 1990, by Tim Quinn)
How to Become a Pop Star (in *No.1 Magazine*, 1990, by Tim Quinn)
Channel 20 (in *No.1 Magazine*, 1990-91, by Tim Quinn)
Judge Dredd: The Hand of Fate (in *Judge Dredd Megazine 18*, Mar 1991, by Alan Grant)
Armitage (by David Stone):
Influencial Circles (in *Judge Dredd Megazine 10-18*, 5 Sep-26 Dec 1992)
Flashback (in *Judge Dredd Megazine 19-21*, 9 Jan-6 Feb 1993)
Flashback 2 (in *Judge Dredd Megazine 31-33*, 26 Jun-24 Jul 1993)
Crab's Fury (in *Crab's Fury*, Nov 1992, by Guy N. Smith)
Warheads:
Questions and Answers (in *Overkill 21*, 29 Jan 1993, by Warwick Gray. Inks by Adolfo Buylla; reprinted in *Warheads 9*, Feb 1993)
Black Dawn (in *Warheads: Black Dawn 1-2*, Jul-Aug 1993, by Craig Houston)
Hershey/Steel: Degenomancer (in *Judge Dredd Megazine 35-36*, 21 Aug-4 Sep 1993, by David Stone)
Dances With Demons (in *Dances With Demons 1-4*, Sep-Dec 1993, by Simon Jowett)

beginning in **Ghost Rider #41** on July 13 with the return of Lilith and her evil offspring, the Lilin; Blackout returns, Lilith joins Centurious, and perhaps we find out if Ghost Rider is really Zarathos. The story continues in **Ghost Rider/Blaze: Spirits of Vengeance #4** on July 27 and into the next two months.

Two celebration issues this month are **Wonder Man #25** with a multi-level embossed cover around a 48-page special, and **Quasar #50**, another 48-pager sporting a gold holo-grafx foil cover.

Lethal Foes of Spider-Man is a 4-issue mini-series written by Danny Fingeroth with art by Scott McDaniel & Brad Vancata, reviving some of Spidey's old villains, including Doc Octopus, the Answer, the Beetle, Boomerang and the Vulture.

★★US★★ NEWSBRIEF

CONTINUITY

Following the massive **'Deathwatch 2000'** crossover, Continuity begin building up to another crossover in November and December, **'The Rise of Magic'**; the story will be kicked off by a **Shaman** graphic novel, written by Neal Adams and illustrated by Rudy Nebres. But before that a number of titles will begin to introduce the background over the next four months. July includes **Armor #4** and **Megalith #4** and the new **Samuree #1** as tie-ins. To let you know which titles are becoming 'possessed', a foil-embossed demon will appear across the top of the comic.

Todd McFarlane joins forces with Neal Adams to produce **Valeria, the She-Bat #3**, the first of a two-part Spawn crossover featuring a gatefold cover and coming to you in a foil wrapper.

Various other Continuity comics are resolicited, reprinted and relaunched, including **Earth 4 vol 3 #1** which features a *sandpaper* cover! **Crazyman vol 2 #1** is an homage to The Prisoner, **Bucky O'Hare vol 2 #1** is resolicited and comes polybagged with a copy of *Vol 1 #6*, *The Revengers Special #2* is resolicited as **Hybrids: The Origin! #2** concluding the story started in the 1992 **Revengers/Hybrids Special #1** with art by Larry *(Tribes)* Stroman.

DARK HORSE

Caught between the OCP and the hapless citizens of Old Detroit who are being forcibly removed from their homes, RoboCop has to face the latest in Japanese technology, brought in by OCP to make sure the 'future of law enforcement' is made permanently obsolete. It can only be **RoboCop 3**, released to tie-in with the long-delayed film, adapted by Steven Grant, Hoang Nguyen and A. Nichols in three parts starting July 20.

July also sees the weekly release of the latest four issues of Comics' Greatest World: **Rebel**, **Mecha**, **Titan**, and **Catalyst: Agents of Change**, each 16 pages, priced $1.00.

Chris Claremont pens the 12 part **Aliens vs Predator** series **The Deadliest of the Species**; #1, shipping July 13, opens with the dream-haunted Caryn Delacroix in a skyliner high above the Alien-infested Earth, dreaming of bloody death...or perhaps not dreaming but foretelling the future. Jackson Guice pencils,

Continued on page 18

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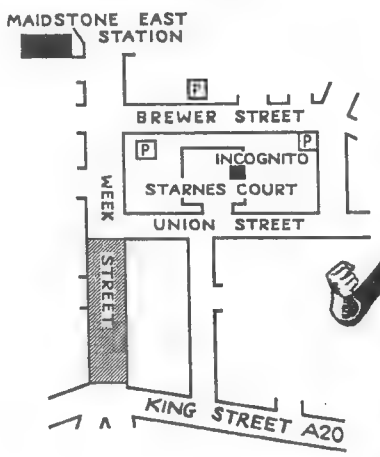

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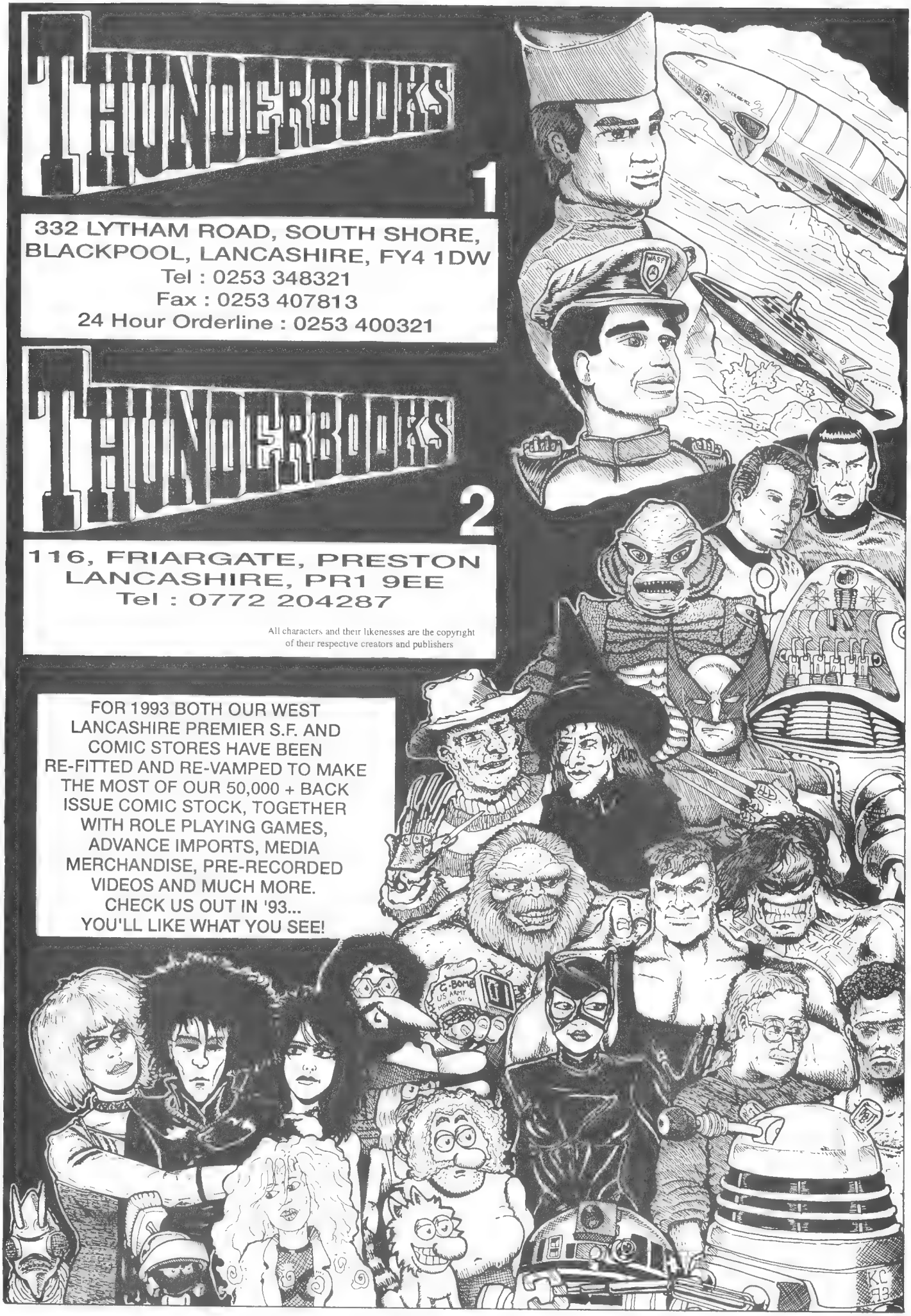

Terry Beatty inks and John Bolton provides covers.

Harvey Pekar's **American Splendor** moves to Dark Horse with #17, with autobiographical tales by Pekar, Jim Woodring, Paul Mavrides and others.

Eddie Campbell launches 'When Immortals Meet', a battle between Hermes and the Eyeball Kid, the first part appearing in **Dark Horse Presents #76** with a Campbell cover. The same issue concludes the Moebius/Jodorowsky 'The Madwoman of the Sacred Heart'.

Ed Pensa never wanted to be a hero but he suddenly finds himself in another dimension, and his only friends are an assault rifle and a seven-foot purple nightmare known as **The Eudaemon**. From the pages of *Dark Horse Presents*, the bimonthly three-parter by Nelson Decastro begins July 20.

Dark Horse re-release of the 1988 **Grendel: Devil by the Deed** by Matt Wagner & Rich Rankin which retells the origin of the original Grendel from the point of view of Christine Spar; newly coloured, the 48 page one-shot includes a pin-up gallery, priced $3.95.

DEFIANT

Jim Shooter's Defiant universe is set to expand beyond **Plasm** (due August), with help from Chris Claremont, who is working with Shooter on background concepts, and will eventually write his own title. Future titles will include **Dark Dominion**, due October, is written by Shooter for Steve Ditko, with inks by Steve Leialoha, **The Good Guys** by Mike Barr with pencils by Ken Hooper, due November; in 1994 another five titles will be added: **War Dancer**, co-written by Shooter and artist Alan Weisas, **Charlemagne**, **Glory**, **Prudence & Caution** (which will probably be the Claremont title, a male and female team), **Dogs of War** and **Mongrel**. More news next month!

FANTAGRAPHICS

Unlucky for some, **Hate #13** includes 'I Left My Stash in San Francisco' in which Buddy finds George Cecil Hamilton III has put out a fanzine dedicated to trashing Buddy; and when he can't beg, steal or borrow every copy there's only one solution: put out his own fanzine.

Love and Rockets #42 is the first of a new quarterly schedule of non-continuing stories, although the first story, 'Gonna Make You My Man', is an epilogue to 'Wig Wam Bam' which ran in #s 32-39, and which is reprinted this month as a 128 page collection, in softcover for $12.95, hardcover for $35.00, and in a signed limited deluxe edition at $39.95.

HEROIC COMICS

Daerick Gross & Martin Powell offer a hero for our times in the six-issue limited series **Blackwatch #1**, in which the hero has to face the greatest battle of his life, AIDS. 44-page, black & white, priced $3.95.

IMAGE

Image take over *Deathmate* for **Deathmate Black** and **Deathmate Red**, the colour-coded crossover with Valiant (see whom for more). *Black*, whose lineup includes Jim Lee & Marc Silvestri, links Lee's WildC.A.T.S and H.A.R.D.Corps on a darker Earth where Jacob Marlowe finds himself ruler of the Western Hemisphere, enforced by Wildcorps. Also starring are Warblade, Ripclaw, Turok and X-O Manowar. Over in *Red* by Rob Liefeld & Dani Miki, Prophet enters an unholy alliance with Chapel and Gilad the Eternal Warrior against Youngblood and their latest member, Bloodshot.

Alan Moore teams up with Steve Bissette, John Totleben, Jim Valentino & John Workman for **1963 #4: Tales From Beyond**, two more stories for the nostalgic: 'The Unbelievable N-Man' and 'Johnny Beyond'.

Keith Giffen joins **Bloodstrike** with #4 as plotter and layout artist. His own **Trencher** reaches issue 3.

Brigade #0 fills the gap between **Youngblood #0** and the **Brigade** limited series, chronicling the events that led up to the formation of Brigade and the first encounter between Battlestone and Youngblood's Shaft.

In **The Savage Dragon #2**, the Dragon takes on the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles in a story continued by Mirage studios next month! Erik Larsen also introduces a new member of the Freak Force, Dart, a Star solo

Continued on page 20

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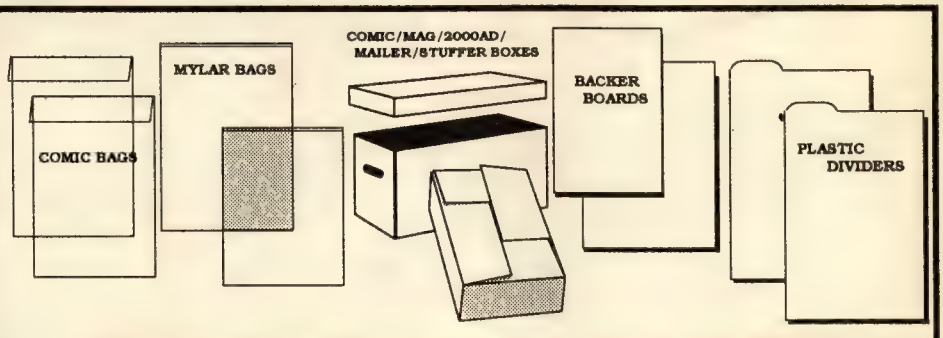

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Continued from page 18

adventure, and a flip-side preview of Vanguard by Gary Carlson, Tomm Coker & Jim Sinclair. To fit it all in this issue goes up to 48 pages, priced at $2.95.

Now the special covers have stopped, Mike Grell's **Shaman's Tears** drops to the more affordable $1.95 with issue 3.

The Violator continues his starring role in **Spawn #15**, Todd McFarlane continuing to write following the four-issue guest spots. Another new writer takes over shortly, Grant Morrison as McFarlane heads for a **Batman/Spawn** cross-company crossover with DC, although other rumours have another artist involved. **The Violator** will be getting his own three-issue series written by Alan Moore and drawn by Bart Sears, with inks by Mark Pennington.

Dafydd Wyn is a new name appearing in the pages of Jim Lee's **WildC.A.T.S.: Trilogy**, a young Welsh writer who has never previously written a comic. How did he secure what must be one of the most sought after jobs in comics? Simple: he submitted a script to Lee's Homage Studio, as was requested in *WildC.A.T.S. #2*, and it was picked out. Easy, eh?

INNOVATION PRESS

A new tough, gritty hero hits the racks when **Mack Bolan: The Executioner** launches in July, based on Pendleton's hit one-man-army character who has often elicited comparisons to The Punisher; Bolan's an ex-Vietnam vet whose family are killed by the Mafia. Although Pendleton no longer writes the books (they're ghosted by a team of writers) he and wife Linda are adapting his early novels.

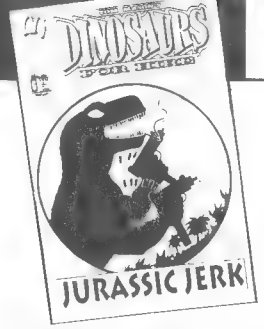
KITCHEN SINK PRESS

The third **Xenozoic Tales** collection, **Cadillacs & Dinosaurs: Time In Overdrive** collects issues 9-12 of the highly popular series by Mark Schultz & Steve Stiles. *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs* will debut as a CBS-TV animated series this autumn.

MALIBU

Malibu will debut **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine** in August, written by Mike W. Barr & drawn by Gordon Purcell. Under an arrangement with Paramount, Malibu will be able to adapt scripts from the actual show as well as create all-new stories. And, like the premiere episode of the TV series, the comic book will feature the occasional visit from Captain Picard and other characters from *The New Generation*.

The Ultraverse adds two new titles in July: **Freex #1**, a teen-group of misfits with superpowers who want to know where they came from; and **Mantra #1** features the reincarnated eternal warrior, Lukasz, killed time and time again in the battle between Archimage and the evil Boneyard. Both come polybagged with a free Skybox Ultraverse trading card. As a further innovation, Malibu Films' **Reel Comics** will begin production on a half-hour live action video, **Project Ultra** which will conclude a 4-issue comic book mini-series.



Malibu's best-selling **Dinosaur's For Hire #7** has a *Jurassic Park* parody cover around a story entitled 'Dinosaurs That Go Bump In The Night'.

Yet another Protector's spin-off arrives in the shape of **Gravestone #1** (of 3); Gravestone is promptly killed, but that's not a real problem for an immortal man...all he has to do is find his way back from Hell!

MILLENIUM

Asylum is a new horror anthology for July featuring stories and art by John Bolton & Nick Vince, P. Craig Russell, Duncan Eagleson & Steven Seagle, and Matt Howarth. There's a bonus story by Al Williams, and a cover by Bolton.

Roy Thomas is the writer of **H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu: Festival of Death #1**, a three-parter with art by Justin Norman, set in the quiet town of Kingsport where unspeakable rituals are being performed. Kelley Jones provides the cover.

NORTHSTAR

Alejandro De La Pena, the malevolent vampire from **Cold Blooded**, returns in a 48-page one-shot entitled **Cold Blooded: The Burning Kiss**, set 70 years after the original events. Written by Frank Gomez & Rafael Nieves, with art by Kyle Hotz & Adam McDaniel, the prestige format b&w has a centre-spread poster by Jim O'Barr and a foil-enhanced cover by Kelley Jones.

Continued on page 57

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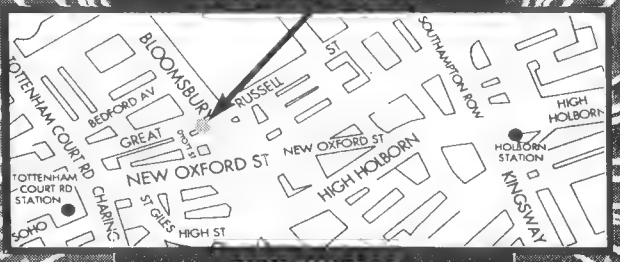

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GARTH THE

BEFORE SAM BECKETT TOOK HIS FIRST QUANTUM LEAP, BEFORE JAMES T. KIRK FIRST VOYAGED SPACE, BEFORE DOCTOR WHO FIRST STEPPED OUT OF THE TARDIS, THERE WAS GARTH. FOR 50 YEARS HE HAS TRAVELLED TIME AND SPACE, FIGHTING INJUSTICE AND RIGHTING WRONGS, A COSMIC CHAMPION, A HERO. IN TODAY'S HARD-BITTEN WORLD OF PUNISHER CLONES AND ANTI-HEROES IT MAY SOUND CORNY, BUT GARTH IS THE LONGEST RUNNING DAILY STRIP IN BRITAIN, CLOCKING UP 50 YEARS IN REAL TIME. BILL STORIE TAKES THE CONTROLS OF THE CHRONOSCOPE TO LOOK BACK

Garth, the* Daily Mirror*'s Man of Mystery, was conceived by Steve Dowling, a successful writer/artist who was already providing two popular strips for the paper. Liverpool-born Dowling had come to strips by accident, literally: a car crash involving Steve, his brother, scriptwriter Frank Dowling, and an artist who was drawing Frank's* Mirror *strip, 'Tich'. The artist was killed, and Steve Dowling took over, despite injuries, quickly giving up his day job at Dorlands Advertising Agency because the six weekly episodes of the pantomime strip could be produced in one day, allowing Steve plenty of free time.

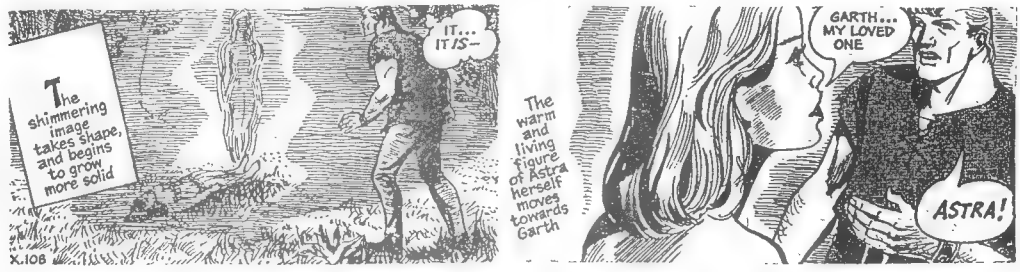
The *Mirror* was undergoing a revolution in the mid-thirties, spearheaded by editorial director Harry Guy 'Bart' Bartholemew who was highly influenced by American newspapers, particularly the New York *Daily News* where the editors realised the power of strong illustration, headlines that SHOUTED, and had a strong comic strip section. Bart enticed Basil Nicholson from an American advertising firm an gave him the post of Features Editor; the results were a revolution in the strip cartoons being run by the *Mirror*, the new arrivals over the next few years including 'Little Lost Annie' look-alike, 'Belinda Blue Eyes', Britain's first continuity strip, 'The Ruggles' a family saga, the detective 'Buck Ryan' and the outrageously hilarious 'Just Jake'.

By 1943, Dowling – writing and drawing 'Belinda' and 'Ruggles' – found the workload too high: he was a Captain in the Home Guard, and was travelling in to London from Bristol where his family were evacuated. He dropped 'Belinda', but Bart wanted his money's worth from the contracted artist, and asked Dowling to create a new strip, or his pay would be reduced. It was by no means an easy task (Dowling was 'fined' for taking so long), but on Saturday 24th July 1943 the world met Garth for the first time: a man of mystery, washed ashore on a raft, unconscious with no memory of who he was and where he came from. Gordon Boshell, a BBC producer who was working for the *Mirror* at the time, was to be the writer, but had commitments elsewhere, so Dowling initially wrote and drew the strip until a replacement was found in the shape of Don Freeman.

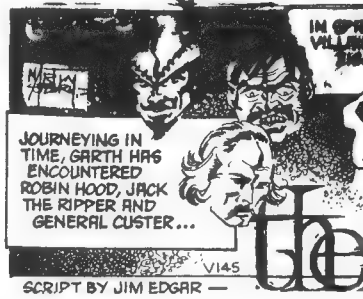
Freeman created the Garth mythos and the framework in which Garth still operates today, creating an origin for the man of mystery – with a few strategic questions still unanswered. On the artistic side, Dowling took on a 15 year-old assistant, John Allard, who, with only one short break to complete his National Service, stayed with the strip until he retired in May 1993, as assistant until Dowling's retirement in 1969, as artist until Frank Bellamy took over full-time in 1971, and subsequently as cartoon editor and sometimes writer of the strip.

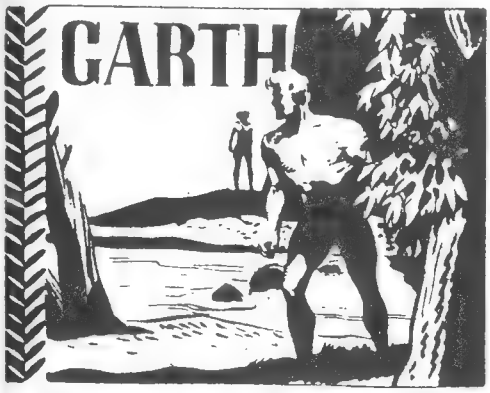
In 1953, following a one-off story by Hugh McClelland penned during a particularly bad illness for writer Don Freeman, Peter O'Donnell took over the strip until 1966, when he left in favour of his own brainchild, 'Modesty Blaise'. The torch was passed to Jim Edgar who would eventually write more stories than any other author, a solid 20 year run before other authors (Angus Allan, Tim Quinn, Phil Harbottle and John Allard) began to fill-in.

In 1971, Frank Bellamy had been invited to contribute to a new *Daily Mirror* colour supplement, which lasted only a few issues; editor Mike Malloy, not wanting to lose the artist, offered him Garth, with Allard as his assistant. Bellamy redesigned the character to give century Venice in the following story. Of course, some things have had to be altered along the way; when the time travelling element was introduced, Garth was actually inhabiting the bodies of his

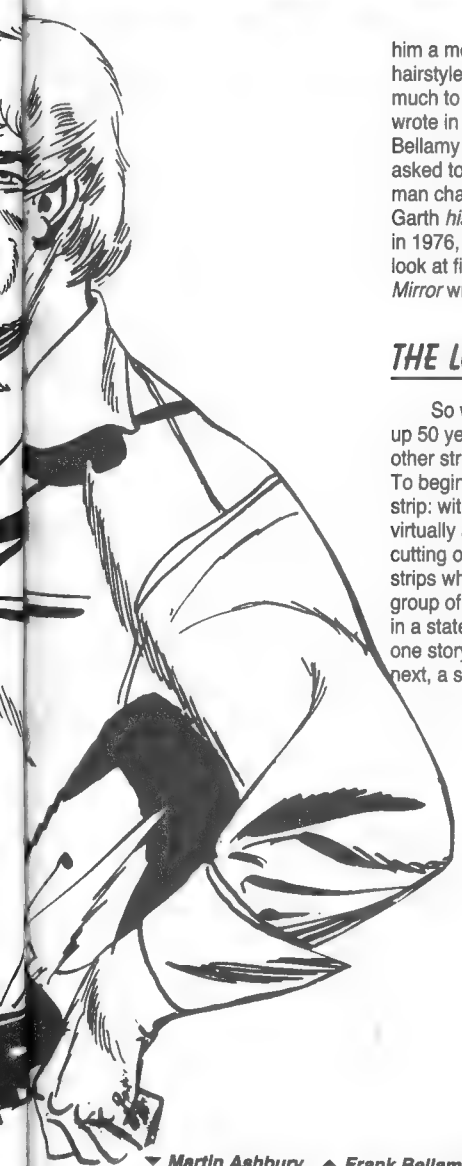

The shimmering image takes shape, and begins to grow more solid
IT... IT IS—
The warm and living figure of Astra herself moves towards Garth
GARTH... MY LOVED ONE
ASTRA!

▼ John Allard





MAN OF MYSTERY



Garth © King Features

▼ Martin Ashbury ▲ Frank Bellamy Steve Dowling/Allard ▶

him a more contemporary look, a new hairstyle, broad chest and slim hips, much to the disgust of some fans who wrote in to complain. The normally placid Bellamy lost his temper when he was asked to revert back to Dowling's muscle-man character – and continued to draw Garth *his* way. Following Bellamy's death in 1976, Martin Asbury continued the new look at first, so closely in fact that the *Mirror* wrongly credited Bellamy.

THE LONGEVITY FACTOR

So why has Garth been able to clock up 50 years of history when so many other strips have fallen by the wayside? To begin with, there is the scope of the strip: with Garth, the reader can travel virtually anywhere in time and space, cutting out the stagnation factor of many strips which are tied to a set location or group of characters. Garth is constantly in a state of flux, a wild west cowboy in one story, a galactic champion in the next, a soldier of fortune in sixteenth ancestors, retro-reincarnation. Subsequent writers have shifted the emphasis of this, so that touching an object may connect him with the past and transport him there. As with many aspects of Garth, the mechanism of how this happens is never made clear, and perhaps this is another reason for his longevity: after 50 years we still do not know who – or what – Garth is. We still have no true origin for Garth.

We do, however, know something of his life: as a baby he was found in a coracle which was washed ashore on the Shetlands where he was adopted and brought up by an old couple who treated him as their son. Growing up on the island he fell in love with a local girl, Gerda, who was accidentally killed by her father, taking a bullet meant for Garth. Heartbroken, Garth left the island to find his destiny, ending up as a Captain in the Navy when his ship hit a mine, leaving him adrift at sea for many days. During this time he was contacted by Baal, servant of 'The Evil One' (Satan, the Devil, whatever) who reveals that he was behind the death of Gerda, and that some day he will kill Garth.

At this time Garth is near to death anyway, and puts the experience down to hallucinations when he sees another figure, Astra, who drives Baal away and saves Garth by guiding him to an island. He is rescued by a team of scientists, including among them Professor Lumiere who takes an interest in Garth's 'hallucinations' – we learn later that Baal and Astra are the last of the Magi, Baal, corrupted by power, now a servant of Evil whilst Astra is the balancing embodiment of Good, constantly in battle with Baal.

Garth and Astra become lovers and, whilst it has never been said in so many words, her cosmic champion, helping her fight evil wherever it may strike. Even this potted history reveals some of the mysteries still unanswered: who were Garth's parents? How did he come to be in the coracle in the first place? Where did the mystic sword, which was found with him on the beach, come from? Is he, in fact, human?

Whilst it is always interesting to speculate, perhaps it is best not to dig too deep because much of Garth's appeal is his mystery, in the same sense as if the Loch Ness Monster was actually found it would soon lose its sense of mystery and magic, and people would look elsewhere for something to fire their imaginations.

Over the years Garth's mighty frame has had so many different interpretations: the soldier of fortune, the historical figure, even a period as costumed superhero, with a winged helmet which allowed him to fly and a cloak which protected him from the cold of space and the time-spiral. Why such flexibility has never attracted the attentions of the regular comic book market is as much a mystery as his origin: Garth has appeared in comics in Australia, in hardcover in Europe, but has never had more than a handful of softcover reprints in his home country, although that is not limited to Garth alone. Garth has been optioned for the movies and television on a number of occasions, all of which have come to nothing. However, his popularity with his readers remains undiminished, and the first 50 years are just the beginning...

EVEN AS A BOY, GARTH SHOWED UNUSUAL STRENGTH...
HE CLIMBED TREES FOR BIRDS' EGGS...
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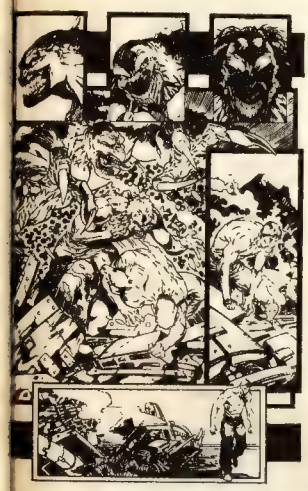
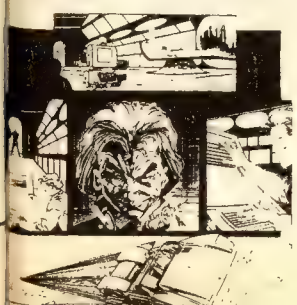
PHIL HALL ON THE DECLINE OF THE MARVEL EMPIRE. . . .





If anyone had told us last year, that Marvel's position at the forefront of comics publishing would go into a steady decline within 15 months and still show a healthy turnover, that anyone would probably have been laughed out of the room.

Today, speculators are crowing at Marvel's fall from grace, pointing fingers at the number of absent Marvel titles from distributors top 50 lists and comparing Marvel's position in those charts a mere 12 months ago. As many as 35 comics featured regularly in the top 50, today only 15 titles make it. Fifteen titles in a chart dominated by proposed Image titles, the constant popularity surge of Valiant comics and that old war horse DC, who have really caught the buying populace by storm with various projects in all their colourful imprints.

The fact that Marvel's sales increased in April and are up on the corresponding year counts for nothing, money generated means little against the all important market share (a sort of stock market chart system). Marvel averaged over 40% for most of 1992; their share is now averaging 34% and they lost that prestigous top spot, which they have held since the market share index was introduced.

Marvel owner Ronald Perilman is buying back Marvel shares at a premium and at an alarming rate and it's Wall Street, not comics insidees, that are predicting Marvel will have a new owner by the end of the year.

This probably doesn't amount to a hill of beans to the average collector or reader of *Comic World*, but it should: one of the main reasons for Marvel's drop in market share is due to you, the consumer. The mass exodus from the hallowed halls coupled with the noticeable drop in standards has got Marvel Zombies buying differently and nothing the mighty Bullpen is releasing is likely to win them back. The age of character selling above creators is over, any claim Marvel had on that particular theory has firmly been dashed and those who do adhere to characters rather than artists are finding Valiant a far less convoluted alternative.

As Marvel continue to use their only recognised talent on the mutant related books, the rest of the line is beginning to sag under its own weight, it must be a harsh reality and a real kick in Tom DeFalco's teeth to see Marvel's 16th highest selling book (in at #56) is the TV tie in **Ren and Stimpy**, and that their top selling title for that month is Spider-Man's arch nemesis **Venom**, in the last issue of his mini series. A regular series is planned for the new year; it may just be too little, too late.

X-Men 2099 premieres in July, by the creative team of John Francis Moore, Rom Lim and Adam Kubert, a creative team that is hardly equivalent to the once mighty mutant creative line-ups. This, along with a mammoth **X-Men/Avengers** crossover and an ongoing **Magneto** series, are the cornerstones of Marvel's big summer objective. Yet there is strong evidence to indicate that the heady days of high X-sales are in steady decline, the failure of **Cable #1** in retail shops being the clearest pointer to this, thus far.

The likely non mutant success from Marvel will be the return of an old friend and the combination of two of his greatest renditioners. **Daredevil: Man without Fear** by Frank Millker and John Romita Jr is a four part mini charting Daredevil Year Zero, the relationship between Matt Murdock and Stick. It will be good to see a team worth remembering working on a character who's book is in dire need of a strong creative team.

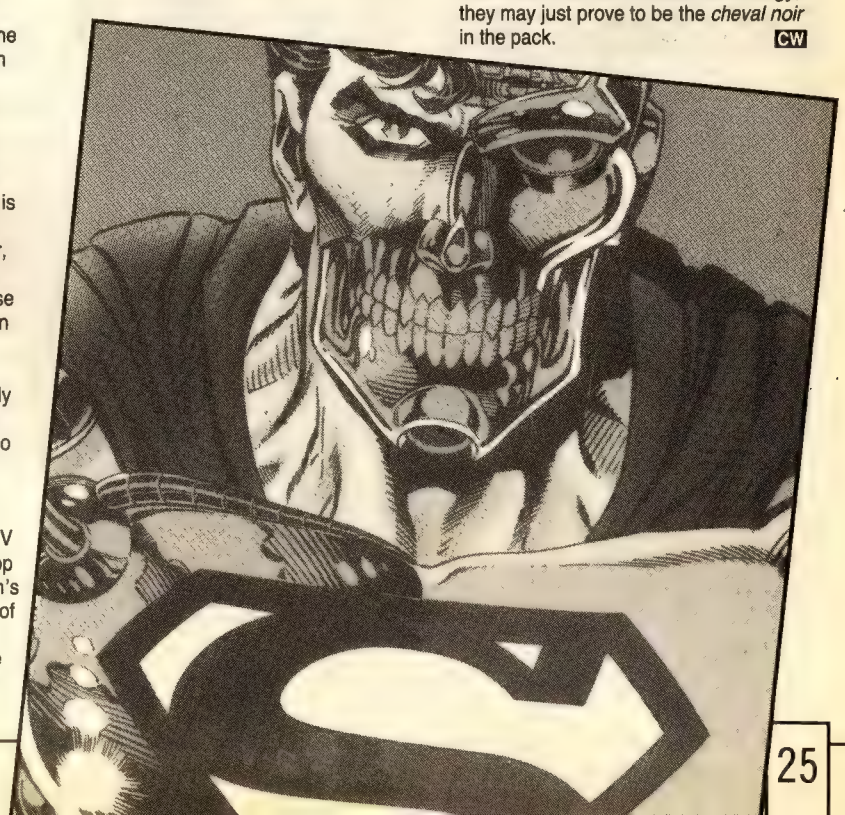
The irony is pin-pointed by Todd McFarlane in a **Spawn** letters page. He said that "There is not enough good talented artists to go around," his reference being to the glut of product Marvel is determined to release and the lack of artists of caliber. Marvel obviously have learnt to pay their top employees more, but they are still losing top talent and up and coming talent on a regular basis. In all of Marvel's existence, there has never been as many titles and as little real talent. If something isn't done to repair the damage, someone else will take their mantle for good.

It is surely a sign of the times when the new kids on the block, Image and Valiant no longer feel they have to compete with Marvel, with neither company choosing to release anything new outside of the probably phenomenal **Deathmate**, and although the six issue mini will undoubtedly be a huge seller for both companies, neither company are intensifying the push or going for the jugular with new projects.

It's DC who seem to be consolidating, Batman's adventures in the current **Knightfall** series within a series selling out fast, and with back issues impossible to find, it is fast becoming *the* wanted comic series. Couple this with the imaginative, if overordered, **Regin of the Supermen** and its nostalgic and refreshing to see the two oldest superheroes reigning supreme again.

Of the rest, who could benefit from Marvel's fall from grace? I hardly feel that Dark Horse's **Comics Greatest World** is destined for greater things: the artistic and editorial hype this series has been advertising doesn't materialise in the first 8 parts except on covers and the concept is looking tired. Dark Horse, through no fault of their own have become the nineties equivalent to Eclipse: for every excellent title produced, it's accompanied by four which defy description. Steer clear of this universe would be my recommendation.

The Malibu **Ultraverse**, however, may be a different kettle of fish and in this time of ever changing tastes, massive cash incentives and modern technology, they may just prove to be the *cheval noir* in the pack. CW



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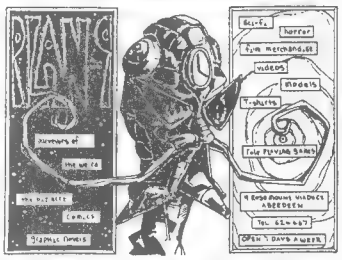

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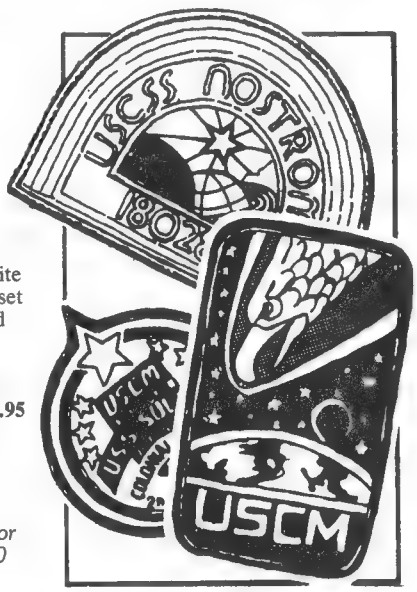

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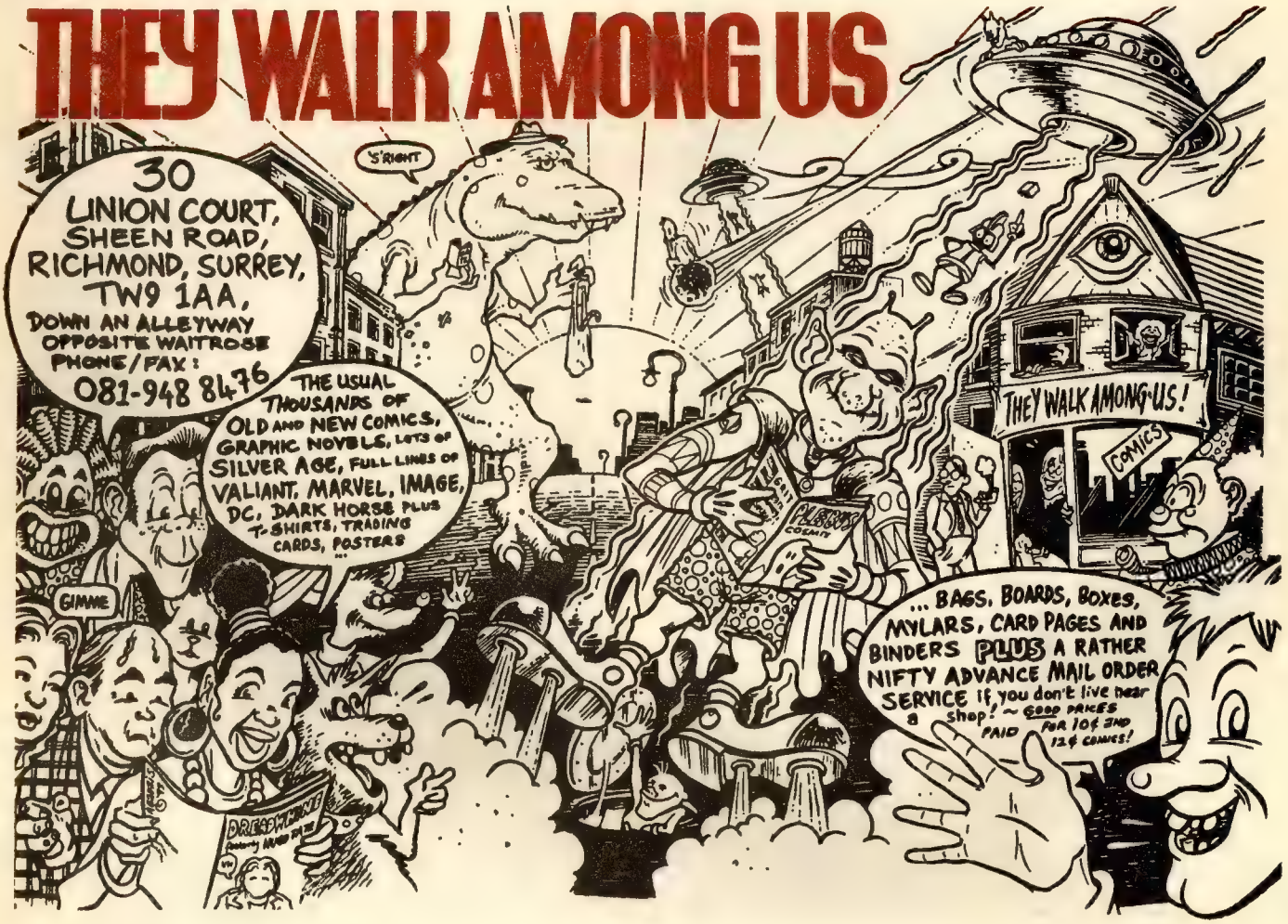
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AFTER DRAWING L.E.G.I.O.N. '93 FOR FOUR YEARS, BARRY KITSON IS EXPANDING HIS HORIZONS WITH TRINITY FOR DC AND WAR MACHINE FOR MARVEL. LANCE RICKMAN DONS HIS BATTLE ARMOUR AND HEADS FOR THE KILLING FIELDS OF NORFOLK. . . .

WAR MACHINE

War Machine ▸

▲ Pencils for Trinity

War Machine, Trinity and LEGION © DC Comics

Barry Kitson's desire to draw comics began early in life: he produced a comic at primary school and as an eleven-year-old, busily copied Jack Kirby's work from the early Marvels. But, following a familiar pattern, he abandoned comics in favour of music and girls in his teens, and his comic collection (four thousand prime early sixties Marvels and DCs) was sold by his father when he was away at university – for seventy-five pounds the lot. Barry became an English teacher and had little contact with comics for ten years, until he moved to Norwich and discovered a local comic shop. He bought a current copy of Fantastic Four *and was soon drawing again.*

British comics artist John Stokes, then working for *Warrior* and Marvel UK, used the same shop, saw Barry's samples and gave him some editors phone numbers. Barry's first published work was a four-part Spider-Man strip in *Spider-Man Weekly*, which he alternated with Mike Collins. Barry is the first to admit that the results were crude, but they gained him more work as a Marvel UK 'house' artist, including the *Captain Britain* back-up 'Space Thieves', where he had his first experience of co-plotting. Barry's feelings about his work at Marvel UK are mixed:

"I did whatever they asked me," he explains, "which at the time were toy-related things: *Transformers, Sindy*, I can't remember them all. They weren't strong sellers, but I was lucky to get the work. I wasn't ready to be dropped in the deep end and I look back at it now and cringe, but I have no complaints, because I was given the opportunity to learn and be paid at the same time."

Barry met several of the *2000AD* regulars at a Marvel UK vs. Fleetway pool match, including Steve McManus, Robin Smith and John Wagner.

"I went on to work with them, did a few 'Future Shocks', then a couple of Dredd strips, while Alan Grant was writing the Anderson on his own, and it started the enjoyable partnership that Alan and I continue to this very day."

Although remembered as a Dredd artist, Barry actually worked on only half-a-dozen stories. "I don't think I ever felt confident enough to do a version of Dredd that was *mine*. Whereas with

"I FIND FIGHT SCENES PROBABLY THE LEAST INTERESTING TO DRAW, BECAUSE COMIC FIGHTS HAVE BECOME VERY FORMALISED"

▲ LEGION

Anderson, although Brian Bolland had established the character, she had never really become associated with a single artist, so I felt a little more license there to do as I wanted. You might as well do things as you want to, and people either like them or don't. It went down very well, and I enjoyed doing it."

Having worked on two of the most prestigious British comic characters, Barry rediscovered his childhood ambition of working for the American companies.

"When you start in the comic business, you think that if you just get to draw a professional strip, you'll be happy for the rest of your life," he says. "When you do that, your horizons shift and you want to do a particular character. At the time, working on Dredd was the pinnacle in this country, but I guess it's like anything; once you reach the pinnacle, you realise that there's another peak just beyond it that you couldn't see. Dredd's still a great character, but there's a lot of limitations to what you can do with him; the format is so different to the States, with short stories, very episodic."

Even more literally episodic was a seven-week stint on the daily Judge Dredd newspaper strip, which he quite enjoyed but was "embarrassed to be associated with the *Daily Star*." Alan Grant had been working for DC for some time and suggested that Barry try his luck.

'I sent some samples over," he says. "One night I was working in the studio on Anderson and the phone rang. It was Denny O'Neil: would I like to draw Batgirl? I instantly said yes, send me the script! I just wanted to start working for DC. I would've taken whatever they offered me."

Until he saw Barbara Randall's (now Kessel's) script, he didn't know that it would be Batgirl's last appearance before she was crippled in *The Killing Joke*.

"It was left with the enigmatic comment that 'anyone can wear the costume', and I was hoping that it wasn't going to be the last Batgirl."

By now Barry realised that he was becoming recognised as an artist who was comfortable drawing female characters. "I do enjoy drawing women, but I much prefer being on a book where there's about equal numbers of men and women. I think I'd get very bored with a book that was just full of muscley men thumping each other all the time."

In fact, Kitson's work on the *Batgirl Special* prompted O'Neil to offer him the *Catwoman* mini-series, but simultaneously his work on *Legion Of Super-Heroes Annual* #3 convinced Art Young and Karen Berger to offer him a new series, *LEGION '89*, again working with Alan Grant.

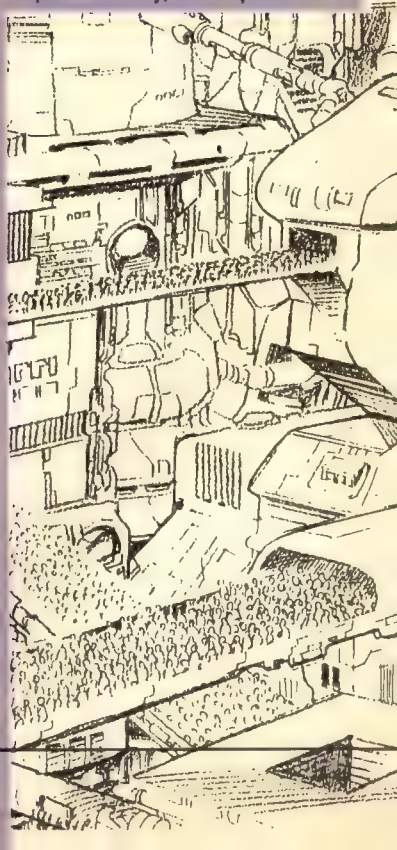
"It came down to a choice between doing the *Catwoman* mini-series or the *LEGION* ongoing. I like drawing high-tech stuff, so I plumped for Legion."

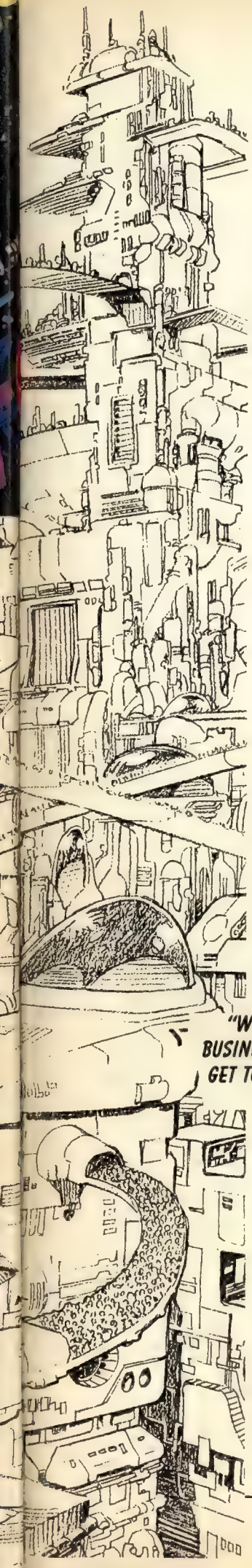
The series, featuring the present-day adventures of the Legionnaires' predecessors, proved popular on both sides of the Atlantic. Barry was soon co-plotting the book and was, for a period, sole writer. But things didn't work out as well as he had hoped:

"I took over scripting because Alan wanted a rest and he considered that I was capable. Most of the people who've written in have been very kind but, as Alan said to me recently, maybe I should stick to my strength; there's nothing wrong with my writing, but it's not as good as my drawing. I found all the negotiations and discussions about what you can or can't do in a plot time-consuming and frustrating. Usually, everything's set when the artist receives it and all you have to do is draw it, but I would spend three days on a plot I thought I'd finished and still have the art deadline. I knew that revisions had to be made but I don't think I knew how time-consuming they could be. For instance, for months we'd been building up to an Adam Strange appearance, and it was only after I'd drawn the last page that we found that there was an Adam Strange mini-series planned and we couldn't use him. Captain Comet replaced him in the time it took to think who he could be, if he wasn't Adam Strange."

Despite these difficulties, Kitson thoroughly enjoys working on *LEGION '93* and appreciates the loyalty of the series' fans. The series, along with *Green Lantern* and *Darkstars*, is at the core of DC's *Trinity* cross-over, what Barry calls "an attempt to have a rip-roaring adventure story, and at the same time define the boundaries and relationships between DC's intergalactic law enforcers."

Barry says that work is always feast or famine, and he had to make another choice when he was offered both *Wolverine* – during the bi-weekly period – and segments of Epic's *Wild Cards* adaptation. Initially, he accepted both.





"Theoretically, I could do everything but it was total chaos. I'd agreed to do *Wild Cards* before *Wolverine*, and once I've given my word to something, I tend to stick to it; looking back, I probably chose the wrong one." *Wild Cards* introduced Kitson to editor Nel Yomtov.

"Nel took over half way through the project, which was in chaos, and we became friends while trying to salvage it. We'd kept in touch and I did a couple of short *Iron Man* pieces for him when I had the time, including the back-up strip in the anniversary issue, #288. On the strength of that, Nel rang up and offered me *War Machine*."

Barry draws many small but detailed thumb-nail sketches of each page before deciding on the panel layouts, then enlarges the final version on a projector, completing between a half and three pages a day. The adjective most commonly applied to Barry Kitson – and one that annoys him greatly – is 'underrated', probably because his work is more characterised by clear, logical story-telling than by huge, irrelevant action scenes.

"Unlike some artists, I find fight scenes probably the least interesting to draw, because comic fights have become very formalised. There may be a thousand ways of showing one guy hitting another but I think they've all been done, although an artist may come up with a new way once in his life to add to the thousand. I've done my share of Gil Kane thumps and Jack Kirby thumps but find it more interesting to make, say, two people talking visually interesting. I try not to think what will impress people but what will tell the story and look good.

"Basically, I'm all for making it easy for the reader to follow. They can do *some* work, seeing what's going on when things aren't said, and I do try to put a lot into the body language. For instance, if things are turning nasty, I may make a panel darker than it would otherwise need to be; subliminal things, but it never occurs to me to do anything for the sake of it. I hope that I would be able to explain why I had done any particular picture any particular way."

Barry confesses himself bemused by the sudden flood of look-alike artists that have recently become so popular:

"WHEN YOU START IN THE COMIC BUSINESS, YOU THINK THAT IF YOU JUST GET TO DRAW A PROFESSIONAL STRIP, YOU'LL BE HAPPY"

"I've been through various crises of conscience, wondering if I should draw like somebody else in order to get hot overnight. I see people suddenly reaching an audience of half a million or so, just by copying another artist. But the immediate future for me is to get my work seen by people who haven't seen it yet, without compromising my style. I really enjoy *LEGION*, I'm involved with all the characters, it's been very good for me and the people reading it have been very supportive, but unfortunately there are only a limited number of them. I feel that what I do is worthwhile, so I'd like to get as many people to see it as possible, and just doing Legion and nothing else would have left me preaching to the converted, as it were. Hopefully, these other projects will give me a wider audience." **CW**

SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN
THEY'VE HAD THIS COMING FOR A LONG, LONG TIME.
I CAN TELL THEY'VE SPOTTED ME.
GOOD.
MEANS I'VE GOT THEIR ATTENTION.
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WAR MACHINE

Designed by Kevin Hopgood, *War Machine* has appeared in *Iron Man* since #288 and has recently become a member of the *West Coast Avengers*.

"There were no plans for a *War Machine* comic," Barry explained, "but the reader-response was such that editor Nel Yomtov and writers Len Kaminski and Scott Benson went to the higher-ups at Marvel and asked about a mini-series. The reply was, 'Why bother with a mini, do an ongoing', and Nel rang me. It seemed like I couldn't ask for a better opportunity at Marvel than the first issue of an ongoing series, starring a popular character, with an editor I know and trust and writers I have respect for."

Tony Stark's friend and sometime replacement Jim Rhodes has been a supporting character in *Iron Man* for many years, although Barry feels that his character has been sketchy.

"Apart from the fact that he's a good guy, there's a lot about him that's never been defined."

Rhodey's personality is far stronger in his new identity as War Machine and in his new found affiliation to Worldwatch, an independent organisation set up as the legacy of a great African statesman. More interested in moral, humanitarian and ecological choices than those of national security or world politics, it isn't long before Worldwatch (and War Machine) clashes with the CIA-like SHIELD.

"Worldwatch gives Rhodey the opportunity to do something he believes in with the armour, rather than simply be a hired gun for other people. It should have its fair share of fights and explosions, but all the creators intentions are to make people think as well. The writers seem determined not to let it become just another gratuitously violent title where people with big guns blow each other away all through it. They have some serious things they want to say, which suits me, and a very strong supporting cast, which I got to design."

Barry has been pleased to find that he wasn't expected to change his style or approach. "They said they wanted me to draw like myself, to make this book look like mine. I don't feel I've had to compromise my values in doing any of this; the terms that War Machine offered were the terms that I couldn't possibly refuse. It has been slow to start with, because I'm not familiar with the design, but I also wanted to make it a spectacular first issue.

The release date is still to be set, but *War Machine* will debut as a double-sized first issue with an enhanced cover, guest-starring Nick Fury, Cable and Deathlok. It will be inked by Ray McCarthy.

"I'm really enthusiastic about the book," Barry says, summing up. "I think it's going to be something significantly different enough to hold people's interest and it has a great feel to it, that we're all working together to make it as good as possible. And, hopefully, it'll be a chance to make a bit of a mark in the Marvel universe."

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Timing is abs

▼ Valiant Era Trading Card

Art © Voyager Communications Inc.

"It's been the kind of book I've been looking forward to do for a long time – I love team books!" enthuses Bob Layton on Valiant's imminent publication of* Secret Weapons, *both written and pencilled by Joe St. Pierre.

"One of my earliest memories is of reading* The Justice Leage of America *– it was a dime and you could get all the characters in one book – that always appealed to me as a younger reader and the only trouble was, I really couldn't do it here until now because we didn't have enough characters.

"There are three cast members in every issue, characters that don't normally have there own books: Geoff the Geomancer, Livewire, and Stronghold from *Harbinger*, and we rotate with various other characters depending on particular storylines.

"They're characters not known to be together in public, and so in a way they are secret weapons, but they're not an organised team; like The Smashers!" he jokes. "*Secret Weapons* is just a title for the book that's descriptive of them.

"The first two issues are a major epic where Master Darque makes one of his big moves. The third issue Joe immediately turns the tables and tells a tall story which is kind of tongue in cheek." Eternal Warrior and Archer & Armstrong pop if for this issue. "After that he moves on to an entirely different type of storyline. Every issue he's trying to take things in a different direction. It's going to have a wide appeal."

"We can feature characters who don't have their own titles," says Jon Hartz, adding, "We can also team certain guys that may initially seem unlikely, like Shadowman & X-O Manowar, and be able to tell the kind of stories that we wouldn't ordinarily be able to in their own individual books." To which Layton says cryptically, "One other advantage is it gives us the opportunity to try out new characters."

A new character to hit the stands in August, even if at first the book's title appears to contradict as such, is *The Second Life Of Dr. Mirage*, pencilled by rising superstar, Bernard Chang of whom writer for the series Layton says "He's got to be the James Brown of Comics!" Rounding out the book is inker Ken Branch.

"*Dr. Mirage* is a real experiment," muses Layton. "I want to do a book that has a wider appeal than mainstream superheroes. This is a very romantic book: the love relationship between Dr. Mirage and his wife, Carmen, that's really where my focus on the book is. I want to create characters that I think women can relate to as well as the male audience, although it still has all the action and adventure people have come to expect from Valiant."

Described as "the antitheses of Master Darque," the tragic yet heroic events of the intangible Dr. Mirage will also be featured in other Valiant books, while his aforementioned evil counterpart

is due to settle down between *The Shadowman* and *Dr. Mirage* books and concentrate his scheming therein.

The major comics event for many this summer is the Valiant/Image crossover series, *Deathmate*. Amongst the praise heaped on Valiant is their commitment to delivering books on time, a description hardly applicable to Image. With both companies publishing individual issue did this bode well for the series?

"First of all, I think Image are trying to get their books out on time," comments Hartz, "And as they build up their infrastructure – their company, manufacturing, the production end – I think they're getting better all the time. Our books will definitely come out on time, and I think they're really committed to the project and they'll keep to the time schedule as well.

"We've also designed *Deathmate* so that each of the books can be read independently." Thus the reason for designating colours for the books rather than individual numbers.

same point in time and space. "They both come from completely opposite universes, and when they get together and start talking and relating to one another it causes ramifications: their universes are blown apart then developed back together again to form a new one that features characters from Image and Valiant."

"We have quite a few different projects in the fire right now," adds Hartz, "But in terms of release times it's going to depend on both the individual creators and our schedules.

"We try to be consumer friendly. The average Valiant fan who wants to buy all of the Valiant products in a given month spends roughly $35-40; therefore, what I don't want to do is oversell it, and come out with four or five new projects in the space of one-two months, because that puts an unwelcome burden on the purchaser: he has to decide what he is going to give up, because he only has a limited budget. You can't expect that guy to give up reading other existing titles that he may be purchasing, be it *X-Men*, *Sandman*, or whatever, to buy so many new books all in one-two months. What we do is try and space our launches out so that we can accommodate that man a little more readily.

"Basically, when all's said and done, Bob's and my own intention is to never to publish more than about 18 different regular Valiant titles. It makes it more user friendly, so a Valiant reader can afford to buy all the Valiant titles he wants; and it makes it easier to deal with crossovers. We'd rather put out 15-18 regular monthly titles and make those the best we can, than put out 60-100 titles a month, and have five or ten looking great, and the rest just out there!"

"And we're not going to do *Web of Eternal Warrior*, or *Bloodshot Tales*," exclaims Layton, "I don't want to dilute the titles like that."

UNITY

"I don't want to call us bookworms," says Hartz, "But all of us read a tremendous amount of books, and the kind of stories that have always satisfied us, not only in terms of comics, is well written stories where you get a beginning, middle and end, that have a certain amount of conflict, and a certain amount of great characterisation. That's pretty much what we draw on to build the Valiant universe in that context of giving you a certain amount of satisfaction at the end of the story so that you don't have any other major requests of it." Hartz goes on to compare the episodic, non pay-off style of the *Twin Peaks* TV series

▼ *Deathmate* ▼▼ *Secret Weapons #2*

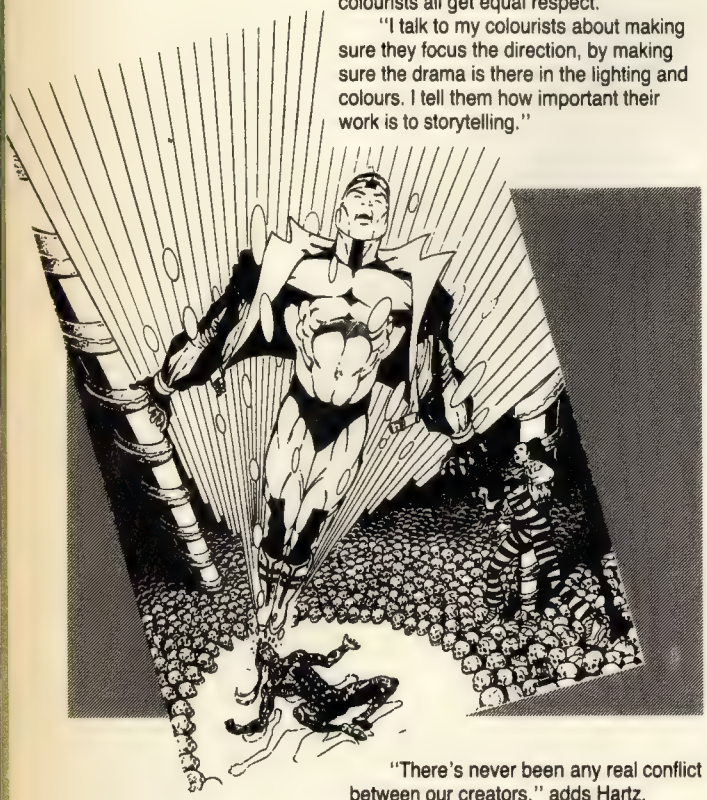
"WELL WRITTEN STORIES WHERE YOU GET A BEGINNING, MIDDLE AND END . . . THAT HAVE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CONFLICT"

"The opening prologue is a sort of a love story, but with dire ramifications. In *Rai #0*, set in the year 3000, our Solar character split and part of him went off to explore this new dimension, and when he does that, he runs into Void from Jim Lee's *WildC.A.T.S.*. another character who is sectioned or has different pieces of herself throughout time," Hartz explains, with the crux of the plot being that both characters become whole at the

and the complete story each programme nature of *Northern Exposure*, commenting on the latter, "After you've finished watching there's no dangling plot, you've enjoyed the time spent with those characters, and you're anxious to watch the next week and see what the new storyline will be. Each week they deal with those same characters, but little by little each story builds upon them, and just like in real life, initially you have a first impression of them, but over a period of time you actually get to know them, either liking or disliking them. And that's what we try to do with Valiant."

"I'll tell you the secret," whispers Layton, joking the serious intention of his words, "The real trick to it is that the writers, the pencillers, inkers and colourists all get equal respect.

"I talk to my colourists about making sure they focus the direction, by making sure the drama is there in the lighting and colours. I tell them how important their work is to storytelling."



"There's never been any real conflict between our creators," adds Hartz, "They're all there in order to work as a unit, tell the story and make a good comic. There's no one person who dominates in any of our books."

"THE REAL TRICK TO IT IS THAT THE WRITERS, PENCILLERS, INKERS AND COLOURISTS ALL GET EQUAL RESPECT

But of course, there is one name which must stand above others: Barry Windsor-Smith.

"Barry did approximately 15 comic books in the last 12 months, and that's probably the greatest amount of work he's ever done in his life!" reflects Layton admiringly, "And not only drawing, but writing also. Quite frankly he's just fried on doing a monthly book!

"I think Barry's just going to sit back and relax after killing himself for so long and not make any commitments for a while; and then he'll choose what he wants to do next. He's never been exclusive to Valiant, but we've discussed different projects we'd love to have him work on.

Joining *Archer & Armstrong*'s new writer, Mike Baron on art will be Mike Vosburg, an old friend of Layton's from his semi-pro days in the '70s putting out titles under the C.P.L. line. Layton says the books direction will change, "I don't want stuff coming off the stand as an imitation of Barry Windsor-Smith's stuff. They (the Mike's) have very strong ideas of where they want to go with the storyline, and I like them. They're going to make the story count. This should be a good team.

"We're not ones to rest on our laurels at Valiant. Like in *X-O Manowar*, Randy Cartier will remain the new X-O for some time. I don't like things to be the same month after month. I believe you have to take risks to keep readers excited, you've got to keep going forward, developing the characters."

BIG CHANGES

And big changes are in store for *Harbinger*, as Hartz reveals.

"*Harbinger #25*, out in October is going to wrap up a lot of loose ends and conclude lots of things we've been building up to. Then in November, the book takes an entirely different turn. The four or five main characters that are in *Harbinger* now are going to take a back seat. In fact they'll never be together again, they may come and go, but they're unlikely to be the main focus again.

"One of the things that we never really resolved is why the title is *Harbinger* – it's almost the name of the enemy's book. We're going to re-focus on Harbingers all over the world and take a look in on Harada.

"He's been sort of this bad guy who's been sitting in the background for a long time. We'll look more into his organisation, at the different training schools he has, and shed a different light on him. Just like the real world, nothing is black or white, no one is really a good guy or bad guy, everybody is different shades. We'll go into that in a little more depth, and into how Harada, the Harbingers, and everyone else relate to each other.

"One of the advantages we have over some of the more established companies, is that we've been very careful about the licensing we do. To change Captain America or Superman's outfit they run the risk of violating their terms of licensing. Every time you enter into a licensing agreement you're entering into a commitment to that licensee that you will not change the book, and we're not trapped by that."

With this in mind, after interest from around six other top companies, Valiant have "cut a deal" to do trading cards with Upper Deck. Hartz gives a number of reasons for their decision.

"They have no other non-sports card licensing; they've always liked Valiant; and they're very easy to work with, we have day to day conversations with the people and talk about the different types of projects we're going to work together on."

So debuting July will be *The Valiant Era Card Set*.

"It reproduces the cover art for all our books from March '91 to December '92, and all the backs will have synopses of what happened in those particular issues. I know it's really hard for some Valiant readers who've only recently picked up on the books to go back and buy some of those early issues, so this will be an easy way to get up to speed on some of the books.

"Another project in the same vein in July is *The Valiant Reader: A Guide to the Valiant Universe*, and we're going to offer that to retailers practically at cost. It will be a 32 page full colour comic book for 75¢, and it will give a synopsis and update on all the various books and characters to date." The text and illustrations will not only give a run down on past and current events for each particular series, but intimate events likely to occur within the next six months to a year.

"It's also a book we're trying to discourage a collectability aspect to," elucidates Hartz. "We're keeping it in print for two or three months after it's shiped, this way for 75¢ new people can learn about the Valiant Universe, but also update all the existing Valiant readers as to what's going on, and how everyone's relating to everyone else. If this is well received we'll update it once every six months or a year."

"Our main focus, for '93, and probably '94, is to just keep building on what we've got." Layton confirms. "I don't want to say that we won't do a creator owned project during that time but most of our efforts and energies are being focussed on trying to build what we have existing. What we would like to do is to be able to offer, special projects about the Valiant Universe, to different creators.

"For instance, hopefully by the fourth quarter of '93 or the beginning of '94 we hope to be doing something called *The Valiant Yearbook*. These will be special projects outside the normal monthly comics but still featuring Valiant characters. The first one we'll probably do is a 40 page *Eternal Warrior Yearbook* by David DeVries and Glenn Lumsden. We also have plans for a *Magnus* book written by Mike Baron and drawn by Paul Smith, a *Solar Yearbook*'s being planned, an *X-O Manowar*, a whole bunch!"

Layton emphasises that with such titles Valiant will maintain their policy of not soliciting orders, or undergoing heavy promotion until the work is in-house, or near to completion. After all, why undermine a strategy that, alongside solid story content and art, has secured them a market share position and reader loyalty most publishers would give their right arm for? CW

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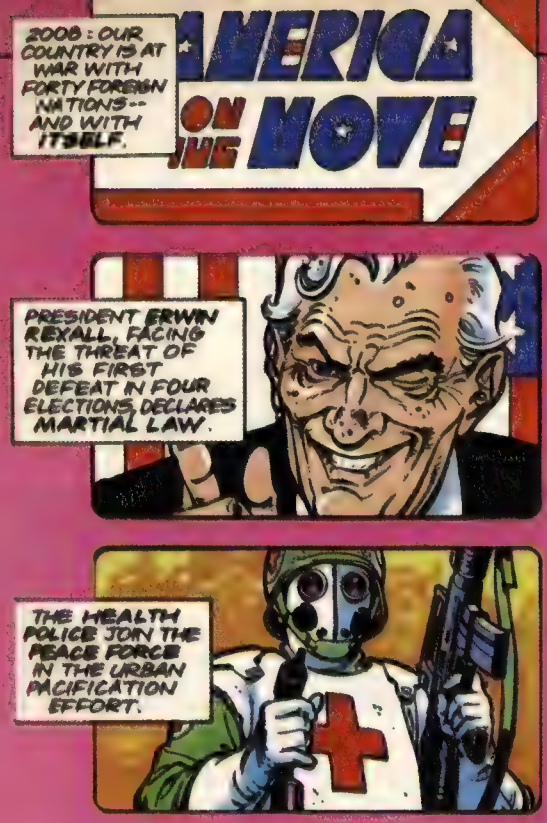
2008 : OUR COUNTRY IS AT WAR WITH FORTY FOREIGN NATIONS -- AND WITH ITSELF.
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WAR DIAR

DAVE GIBBONS IS BACK! THE ARTIST BEHIND **WATCHMEN** AND **GIVE ME LIBERTY** AND WRITER OF **WORLD'S FINEST** AND **BATMAN VS PREDATOR** HAS REUNITED WITH HIS OLD PARTNERS IN COMICS ALAN MOORE AND FRANK MILLER FOR **1963** AND **MARTHA WASHINGTON'S WAR DIARIES** RESPECTIVELY, AND THERE'S MUCH MORE TO FOLLOW. CAN THIS BE THE HARDEST WORKING MAN IN BRITISH COMICS? ALAN WOOLLCOMBE FINDS OUT IN THE FIRST HALF OF A TWO PART INTERVIEW.

Give Me Liberty © *Frank Miller/Dave Gibbons. 1963* © *Alan Moore/Steve Bissette/Dave Gibbons. Watchmen, Superman* © *DC Comics*

Dave Gibbons is having a busy year, even by his standards. Having had to postpone our scheduled interview several times over the past few months owing to his demanding timetable, the fruits of his labours are just beginning to show – inking here (1963), penciling there (Martha Washington's War Diaries), now writing (Aliens: Salvation), now character designing (Riftworld). On top of collaborating with the likes of Messrs Miller, Moore and Lee (Stan), he even popped up recently on the BBC to expound on the merits, or not, of pop artist Roy Lichtenstein's painting 'In The Car'. An outsider might be forgiven for believing that this Renaisscence man of comic arts is the British comics industry.

One measure of the man's success is shown by how much his services are in demand from other comics illuminati. Take *1963*, for instance, the retro-styled brainchild of Alan Moore, Rick Veitch and Steve Bissette: "When I heard about *Mystery Inc* from Steve at San Diego last summer, I really wished I was involved – it sounded just my kind of thing, so much so that when they asked me if I wanted to ink the first issue, I ended up inking the first two and will ink the final issue of the series as well" (the *Tomorrow Syndicate*).

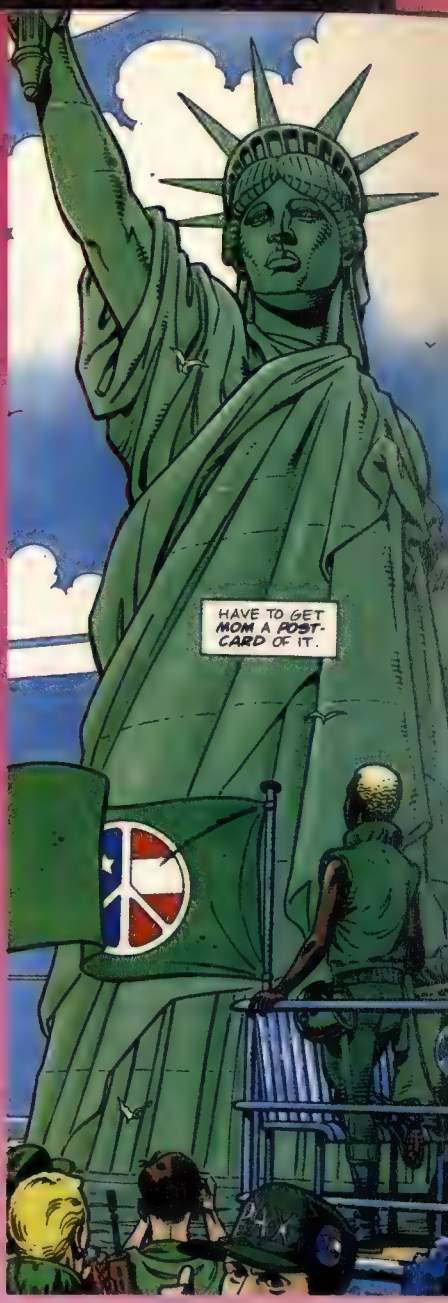
For Gibbons, the *1963* jam session brought all manner of rewards. "It has been the most tremendous fun. In a sense it has been the old gang back together: Alan and I worked on *Watchmen* and various other things and he did *Swamp Thing* with Steve and Rick.

The other thing is that, as technology marches on, we coincidentally have all become equipped with fax machines so, when somebody does a sketch or Alan does some text, there is a big faxing round that goes on and it's almost like being in a bullpen. We all know instantly what's going on and can get involved with it."

Even being relegated to the secondary role of inker has had its plus points. "Although as an inker I have had the least creative input, I've made the odd suggestion and I certainly haven't felt inhibited by anything I've been presented with to ink. Inking is very much the craft end of drawing and it's very relaxing in a way because all the decisions have been made and really it's a question of energizing the artwork and making it print properly. It's comparatively low pressure and I've learnt some lessons from inking Steve and Rick as well."

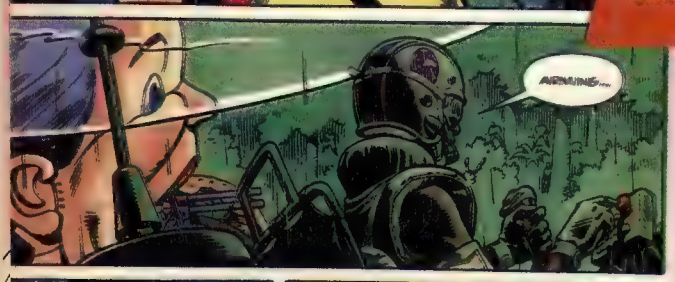
As if to emphasize that fact, *1963* is not the only inking invitation Gibbons has accepted of late. Atomeka's *Monster Massacre* anthology should be hitting the comics racks at about the same time as you are reading this, boasting a collection of short stories about, well, monsters and suchlike. "I said that I'd do something for them. Unfortunately I got overtaken by events and it was obvous that what I was going to be able to do for them was very limited so they suggested that they could still use my name in the advertising if I was to ink a story that Dougie [*Punisher*] Braithwaite had drawn. Basically, it's a ten page story called Headcase about a giant robot that goes berserk – that's about it, plotwise! When you ink somebody's work, you do get to look at it very, very closely and Dougie is an excellent figure artist and a good storyteller. His stuff is actually quite hard to ink because he's got such a delicate touch."

"IF I HAD TO DESCRIBE [GIVE ME LIBERTY] I'D CALL IT A WESTERN/WAR/ ROMANCE/HORROR/ SCIENCE FICTION COMIC"
THIS WON'T KILL ME.
I WON'T DIE HERE.
THIS WON'T KILL ME.
WASHINGTON MARTHA P167444



WAR DIARY

Such assignments, even with the likes of Alan Moore on board, are small beer compared to his artistic collaboration with writer Frank Miller on *Martha Washington's War Diaries*, which continues the adventures of their heroine from *Give Me Liberty*. "If I had to



describe it, I'd call it a western/war/romance/horror/science fiction comic. When Frank and I first talked about doing something together, we wanted to do 'the comicbook without a genre' but I think what we've ended up with is the comicbook that covers all genres! What we're doing is taking all the aspects of fiction that appeal to us and somehow getting them in there. The very first fragment that Frank ever did of *Martha Washington* was like something out of a spaghetti western: it had Martha on a horse riding across a desert with robotic vultures circling. It is hard to classify but I suppose broadly it's science fiction, though hopefully not what you're used to.

"What Frank and I are interested in doing is telling a character's complete life story. That's been attempted before but I don't think it has been done in comics on the scale that we hope to do it, in that you follow every event of someone's long (and hopefully interesting) life. Virtually the first picture in *Give Me Liberty* is of Martha being born, and by the end of the first book she is only sixteen years old and has clearly got quite a way to go. Basically, *Give Me Liberty* was the origin of Martha Washington and the *War Diaries* are the continuing adventures. It's a different kettle of fish from the first one – it's much more expansive."

Mind you, there are similarities. The setting in both is a civil war-torn United States with Martha on the front line and eight factions jockeying for power – "We wanted to have a lot of action in there because Martha works well as an action hero and we love action heroes." What seemed inventive but implausible in the earlier series now seems less far removed from reality – "The real world seems to be somehow mimicking what we are doing. In real life the US Army now is becoming almost like PAX in that it is assuming the role of a global peace-keeping force. That incredible scene where the UK marines landed on the coast of Somalia and the world's press corps was already there waiting for them was just so bizarre that we knew we could go right over the top now!

"SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED TO THE PACE AND ENERGY OF COMICS"

"We also realised that we could have a lot of fun with technology. One always assumes that there is going to be a wonderful future with machines that all work perfectly, but my experience of technology is that the more sophisticated things get, the more they tend to go wrong: if a record player goes wrong you can more or less fix it yourself, but if a CD player goes wrong you don't know what's in there, let alone what to do. This aspect of technology amuses us."

The artist concedes there were rethinks with the earlier series. "When *Give Me Liberty* was first mooted," recalls Gibbons slowly, "Frank and I thought we wer going to do a single volume novel that was going to be God knows how many hundred pages long – the first batch of pages that Frank had sent me was for a 96-page story. This was in the days when a degree of 'worthiness' was in the air and the graphic novel was supposed to be the salvation of comics. In a sense we were rather dilettante about it because we had money from the last things we had done and we thought we would just do the project in whatever time it took."

The crunch came when both parties realised they had drifted off beam so far that it didn't look like the book would ever be finished. "That in itself was a good thing because it made us take stock and realise the direction that we *really* wanted to go in. We came to realise that maybe the graphic novel wasn't the future of comics and that the future wasn't dependent upon format but upon content. *Liberty* then took on a much more interesting, exciting and insouciant air, and that's very much the spirit of *Martha Washington's War Diaries*."

The dilettante aspect, however, is something the pair are determined to avoid this time round. "Since finishing *Liberty* something has happened to the pace and energy of comics: different kinds of comics have come out and there has been the whole Image explosion. When Frank and I did the follow-up eight-page story in *Dark Horse Presents* last year we realised that we could get into shorter pieces, so this time we thought: *Let's really go for it, let's do it with maximum energy*. We rather fancied the idea of doing regular 32-page, disposable, unpretentious, roll-'em-up, stick-'em-in-your-pocket comics, so we decided that we would do the *War Dairies* as a series of five (originally four) regular comicbooks. The tempo of Frank's scripts is very much faster than in *Give Me Liberty*, I've drawn it in a more dynamic way and we are going to have state of the art computer colouring. If you like, we're doing working mens' comics, rather than dilettante comics."

The term 'buckling down to it' doesn't actually cross the artist's lips but the implication hangs heavy. "Having said that, for various reasons the project has become paused so I haven't worked on it for several months now. When I do (which will be very soon), I'm going to work on it at the rate that I worked on *Watchmen* or on things for *200AD* or the *Superman* stories, which is about four pages a week of pencilling, inking and lettering – that's a good, comfortable rate. *Give Me Liberty* probably averaged out at

The Fury and Voidoid Meet Cargo X

"WHEN I HEARD ABOUT **MYSTERY INC** FROM STEVE AT SAN DIEGO LAST SUMMER, I REALLY WISHED I WAS INVOLVED"

maybe two page a week. As with any form of expression, it's a question of going at the right speed – too slow and you can be over-analytical an analyse all the guts out of it, too fast and it can have no guts at all – but I think we've hit that perfect pace with this second lot of Martha Washington."

ALIEN WORLDS

While *Martha Washington's War Diaries* represent the largest single chunk of Gibbons' current output, it is far from the only one. Besides the inking work, he has a number of other projects in mind or in development, most of which he is loath to talk about. He does let slip snippets about one or two, however: "Mike Mignola is drawing a 48-page self-contained Aliens story that I've written called *Aliens: Salvation*. In a word, it's a shipwreck story. I've seen some of the pages that Mike has drawn and they're just great – he can draw haunted eyes like nobody else can. Again, it's great to work with these people who are friends and top-flight artists as well." For another enterprise, a Superman 'Elseworlds' story, involving a surprise big name artist he goes so far as to supply the name of the item (*Kal*) before indicating I should switch off the tape.

I manage to switch it back on again in time for his final announcement. "I was going to be working on a Captain America story which, for various reasons, doesn't look as though it's going to come about. One of the main reasons for doing it was the chance to do something with Stan Lee who I'd met a couple of times in the past year and who had echoed my desire to do something together. . . ." What, *the* Stan Lee, founding co-father of the House that Stan and Jack built? Marvel Comics? Yup, *that* Stan Lee.

"But, coincidentally, last summer I

was approached by Byron Preiss Visual Publications, who I had done one or two interesting little things for over the years – I did a parody thing with Harvey Kurtzman called 'The Super Surfer' in *Harvey Kurtzman's Strange Adventures*, which was a lot of fun. Byron Preiss are very much in the business of putting projects together and finding the writers and artists to work on them. They were doing this universe that Stan Lee had created called *Riftworld*, featuring text, shared universe text stories much along the lines of the *Wild Cards* series. They asked me if I would be interested in doing the character designs which I was because, finally, it was a chance to do something with Stan and also, for me, a change of pace."

Although Gibbons was technically working with the great man, he gives the impression that to call it a collaboration might be stretching things. "There is a link, but it was only inasmuch as I was reading what he had to say about the characters and having the sketches approved or amended by him. I did really want the signature to read "By Stan Lee and Dave Gibbons" but it ended up "By Stan Lee, with illustrations by Dave Gibbons" – it's almost there!"

Despite such disappointments, Gibbons is characteristically generous in his assessment of his co-worker's contribution. "They're very interesting characters: you can see where they're related to other ones Stan has been famous for having his hand in creating" – namely, all the older Marvel superdoers – "but they're all new and not just in the mold of *WildC.A.T.S.* or *X-Men*. They're rather more wide-ranging in their origins and rather humorous as well." Gibbons' sixteen character designs, and the

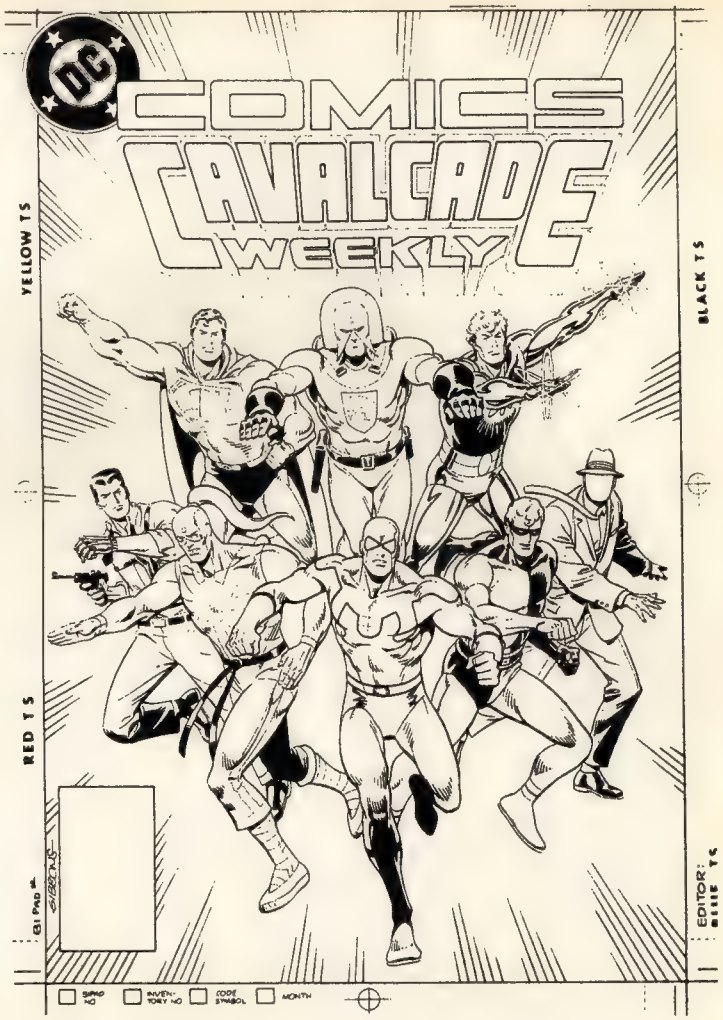
Right: cover art to the aborted DC weekly, Comics Cavalcade

Riftworld stories to which they relate, will appear later this year.

NOTES AND IDEAS

But if Gibbons the draughtsman and character designer seems fully catered for, Gibbons the character creator seems underrepresented in this catalogue of creativity – there is no mention of any all-new characters stemming from his fertile brain alone. Is this accident or policy? "I have a whole notebook full of ideas of what they are going to be. It's a very funny thing: I just write down notes on anything that occurs to me, thinking *This is going to be for a particular story*, but to be honest what I've found is that there are ideas in there for maybe three different, unrelated stories which are all mixed up together at the moment. They're not one-offs but they are series that have some sort of limit to them – in other words things that will have a beginning, a middle and an end. Having said that, a couple of them probably could go on forever.

"There's one idea which I think would fit in with the Vertigo line and as a result of talking to [Vertigo editor] Karen [Berger] my thoughts have got going on that. There's another idea that has super-heroic elements in it and I suppose *could* fit into an Image or Marvel kind of background. . . ." There is a pause in the monologue as he chews over the implications of this last remark. "Actually, I don't necessarily know that what I want to do would fit comfortably into what at present is the Image look or atmosphere – my hope with Image is that they will broaden their base and won't always be solely steroid-pumping mutant super-heroes. I've also been talking to [Dark Horse editor] Randy Stradley for a while about another idea because I thought the way that Frank had *Sin City* appear as a serialized thing [in *Dark Horse Presents*] was quite a nice, low risk way of doing something: it's not like you're launching a whole new series, it's just sneaking out."



"WE WANTED TO HAVE A LOT OF ACTION IN THERE BECAUSE MARTHA WORKS WELL AS AN ACTION HERO AND WE LOVE ACTION HEROES"

And presumably the money angle enters into your considerations at some point? Vigorous head-shaking ensues: "I don't tend to worry about money, not out of saintliness but because I find that, if you do, that's when things go wrong. You don't find the thing artistically satisfying or indeed financially satisfying. There's nothing worse than sitting down at a drawing board and thinking *This is really hard work and I'm not even getting well paid for it.* That's a bad way to start thinking and it's as bad to think *Well, I'm not enjoying doing this but at least I'm getting well paid for it.* The minute money comes into the equation, you've lost.

"There are only two reasons for doing anything (and this isn't original but I agree with it): you either do things out of love or out of interest. You can do something like Martha Washington out of love because it's your baby, or you can do it out of interest (*Yeh, it would be neat to do something with Stan Lee*). The catch is that, when it's your story and you're writing it and you're drawing it, there's nobody to put any pressure on you. The difficulty, if you could call it that, is that people keep offering me other things that I'm finding interesting and exciting and good fun to do, so I'm forever trying to get to a place that, as I swim towards it, gets pushed further and further towards the horizon."

NEXT MONTH: WHO WATCHED THE WATCHMEN?

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Thing wishes to state that the views expressed by Big Dave are not necessarily shared by The Mighty One himself or, indeed, any of his droids.

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Wild Frontier

Not many people would be happy to see their workload expanding in quantum leaps every month but Michael Bennent, Marvel Frontier group editor, is delighted. Not only is his swelling stable of Marvel superhero titles selling well, but at long last he has achieved what he always wanted: a separate imprint entirely devoted, in his words, to "the special and unusual."

So what lurks behind the label that you couldn't find in an average Marvel comic? "You get every genre there is, not just superheroes: horror, science fiction, contemporary, crime, humour. None of the characters are part of the Marvel Universe except in *Immortalis*, where Dr Strange turns up in a minor role. The difference is that the characters stand on their own and act on their own and create their own little universe, as it were. The characters are not creator-owned but the deal with all the creators is that no-one else will touch their characters."

"YOU GET EVERY GENRE THERE IS, NOT JUST SUPERHEROES: HORROR, SCIENCE FICTION, CONTEMPORARY, CRIME, HUMOUR . . ."

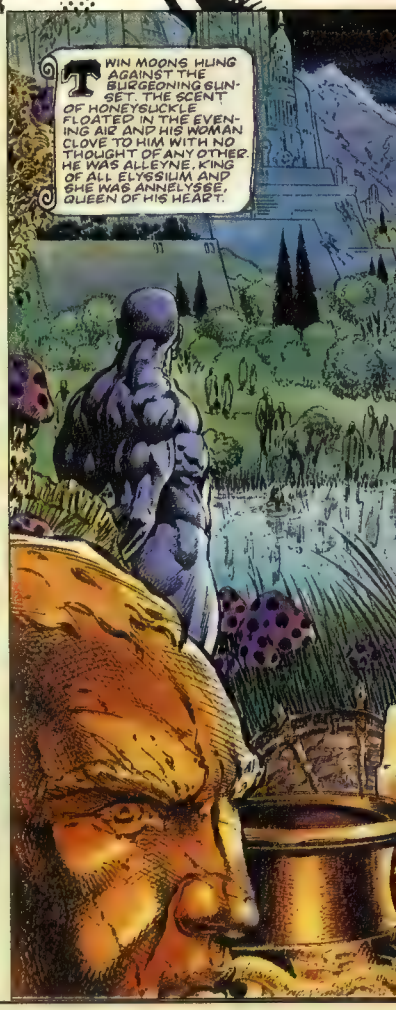
If this has overtones of DC's Vertigo, Bennent is man enough to allow there's a grain of truth to the accusation. "I modelled Frontier on Image actually, but the way it turned out we are probably closer to the Vertigo line now. In the UK it seems to be a contradiction in terms if you say to creators 'Do something that appeals to you but make it commercial at the same time': people tend to go into the deeper recesses of the mind so you get more horror-type titles. That is what Vertigo found a long time ago with *Sandman* and *Swamp Thing* and that is what seems to repeat itself with Marvel Frontier. Having said that, *Blood Seed* would sit well with a publisher like Image with its modern style of drawing and more mainstream approach."

FIRST BLOOD

Blood Seed is perhaps the most high profile of the initial quartet of releases from the label (the others are *Children Of The Voyager*, *Dances With Demons* and *Immortalis*, of which more anon). If any one Marvel Frontier title can lay to rest fears that the imprint will be a home for creative successes but commercial failures, *Blood Seed* is it, coming as it does from the team who created Marvel's top-selling *Death's Head II*, Marvel editor-in-chief Paul Neary and fan favourite artist Liam Sharp.

"*Blood Seed* is a cyberpunk barbarian who finds himself in a world of laser guns and transporter beams," explains series editor Bennent. "There is a message in his genes that he has to deliver to someone and he doesn't even know who it is. Basically he has to go on a quest and he is going to find obstacles in his way. When he meets the person he is supposed to deliver the message to, it will release itself and reveal itself to the reader."

Writer Neary takes up the story. "*Blood Seed* is a mixture of science fiction with barbarianism. Liam and I were both intrigued to a certain extent by barbarian comics per se. I was once involved with a character for Warren Comics called Hunter, which dealt with the themes of a barbarian-looking character who was actually in a post-


TWIN MOONS HUNG AGAINST THE BURGEONING SUNSET. THE SCENT OF HONEYSUCKLE FLOATED IN THE EVENING AIR AND HIS WOMAN CLOVE TO HIM WITH NO THOUGHT OF ANY OTHER. HE WAS ALLEYNE, KING OF ALL ELYSIUM AND SHE WAS ANNELYSSE, QUEEN OF HIS HEART.

Bloodseed, Immortalis, Children of the Voyager and Dances with Demons © Marvel Comics

apocalyptic world. I liked the idea of that. When I talked to Liam about it, it struck a chord with him in terms of the writings of people like Gene Wolfe and we decided to cook something up. It's something not being done in American comics at the moment and at the same time it has nothing really to do with the mainstream Marvel Universe, but it is going to be understandable by people that like that."

The second Frontier title, *Children Of The Voyager*, is written by Nick Abadzis (of Hugo Tate/*Deadline* fame) and, somewhat surprisingly, is pencilled and inked (rather than painted) by Paul Johnson. "The story is all from the point of view of the central character, a young horror fantasy writer haunted by bizarre dreams which get worse and worse," the writer explains.

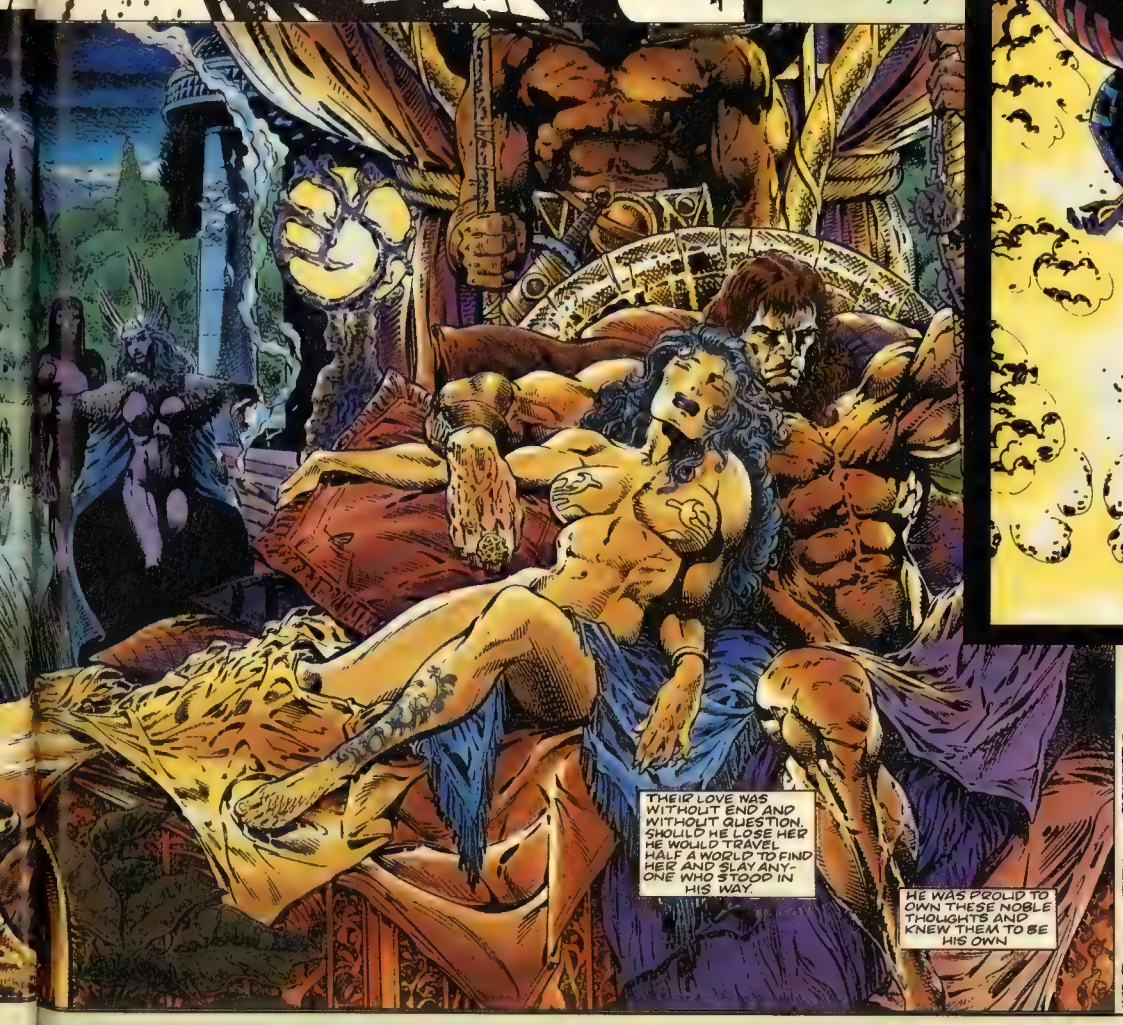
"He has this sense of something coming after him. In order to track down where all this psychological weirdness is coming from, he enlists the help of a witch. She discovers that he is being tracked by the Voyager, a very mysterious dark figure that has been around since man's earliest existence. Basically what it comes down to is a face-off between them."

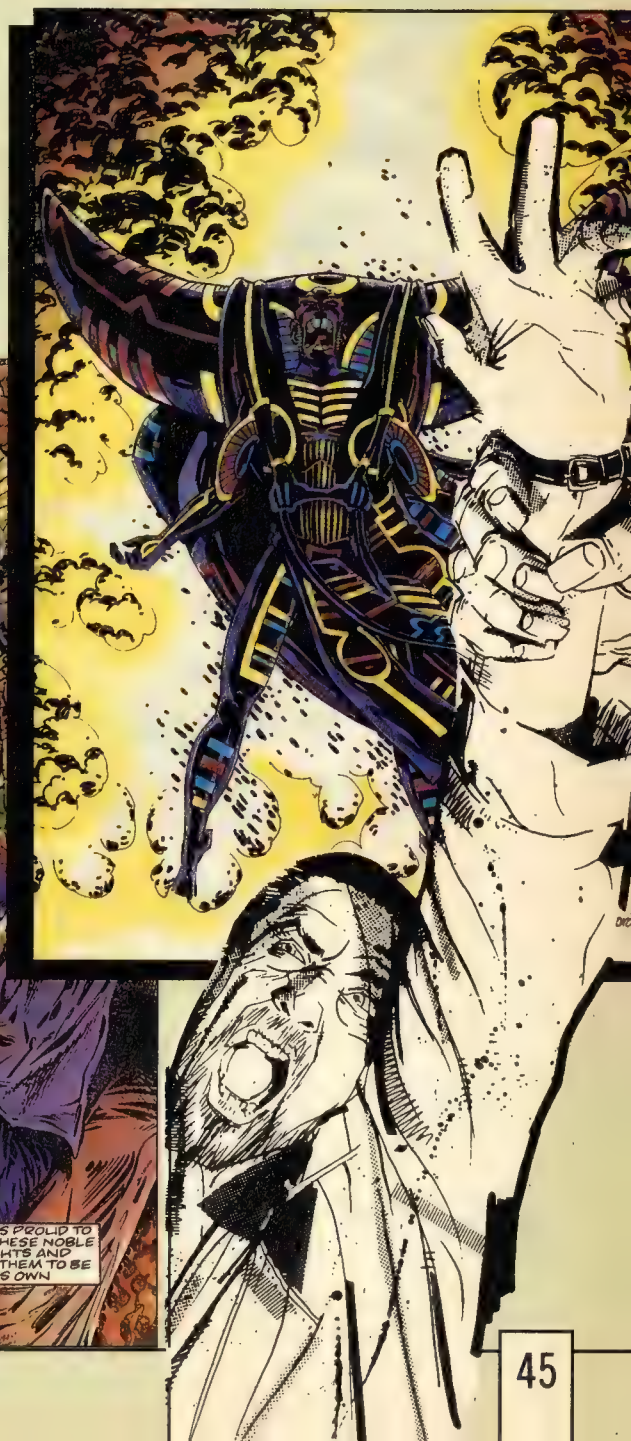
Even more so than with the other books, Bennent's heart and soul is in this one: "Nick gave me a beautiful synopsis and I thought 'This is why I am in this business, I want to publish and read comics like this'. Although *Children Of The Voyager* has no sex and hardly any violence in it, it's a really horrific horror comic in a psychological sense rather than in a splatter sense."

BODY AND SOUL

Editor Bennent himself came up with the basic concept for the third Frontier title, *Dances With Demons*, before assigning it to writer Simon Jowett (who is also doing another two books for Frontier later in the year) and penciller Charlie Adlard. "It is broadly drawn from bits and pieces of American Indian mythology," Jowett (himself a regular *CW* contributor) confesses. "I wanted to do a contemporary story and to make darker use of Indian mythology than has been used previously. I wanted to avoid the more obvious green hippie, hug-a-tree aspects."

"The hero of the story is James Owl, a teenaged Beverly Hills beach bum," recites Bennent, "who gets the power of the Ghost Dancer (or the Indian word for it), the guardian of the Indian spirit worlds. The villain of the piece is the Manitou who wants that power. When the


THEIR LOVE WAS WITHOUT END AND WITHOUT QUESTION. SHOULD HE LOSE HER HE WOULD TRAVEL HALF A WORLD TO FIND HER AND SLAY ANY-ONE WHO STOOD IN HIS WAY.
HE WAS PROUD TO OWN THESE NOBLE THOUGHTS AND KNEW THEM TO BE HIS OWN



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▲ *Immortalis*
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Manitou is about to defeat the previous Ghost Dancer (James Owl's grandfather), the Ghost Dancer spirit rises up and joins with James to become the new Ghost Dancer. He has two forms, a human one and another one, and the spiritual power from his dead grandfather gives him all the wisdom and knowledge to be what he is. . . ."

And if that sounds spooky, possums, try the last of the Frontier foursome, *Immortalis*, written by Nick Vine and pencilled by Mark Buckingham. It's a "chilling story of mysticism, horror and vampirism", according to the editor of the series, Gary Russell. "*Immortalis* is about a chap called Mortigan Goth (Immortalis) who makes an erroneous pact with Mephisto in the 17th century, by which the archdemon gets Mortigan's soul and Mortigan becomes immortal. We pick up the story with his old friend Dr Strange coming to England to meet him, because Strange realises that in his travels Mortigan Goth may find a way to cure vampirism." The vampire theme is reinforced by the inclusion of Falsworth Manor, home of Spitfire and the original Baron Blood, Captain America's vampiric nemesis from World War Two. Goth also has a sidekick, "a ghostly partner who doesn't understand what is going on."

But don't all these familiar Marvel faces make *Immortalis* a regular Marvel comic under a flag of convenience? "Only insomuch as it features three Marvel characters," avers editor Russell. "Of all the Frontier stuff it has the most connections into the Marvel Universe but they're quite peripheral, and because it takes place mostly in the UK you lose immediately that strong Marvel feel. It will be as connected to the Marvel Universe as *Sandman* is to the DC Universe – future stories will veer much further away. I think we will have the same appeal with *Immortalis* as Sandman has."

Not that Michael Bennent's plans for the imprint end there. Three further projects have been given the green light for between now and Christmas: *Heavy Weapon 911*, a "humour-oriented title about a big robot with big guns, *Sisters Of Grace*, "another humour-based title about six hot babes in space", and *Frontier Unlimited*, a quarterly anthology title among the lines of *Dark Horse Presents*.

There seems little doubt that for British creators and all those interested in seeing comics tackle long dormant genres Marvel Frontier is A Good Thing and a promising declaration of intent. The big question will be whether the label can maintain that commitment to the special and the unusual and not be tempted to abandon it in favour of concentrating on a few choice plums. CW

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Illustrations from Immortalis #1

IMPERFECTION

IN THE THIRD AND FINAL PART OF OUR EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WRITER AND ARTIST, NICK VINCE AND MARK BUCKINGHAM DISCUSS THE HORRORS OF MISINTERPRETATION, THE NIGHTMARES OF WRITERS AND ARTISTS BLOCK, AND THE NUMBING EFFECTS OF UNCOMFORTABLE CHAIRS.

Even the most perfect things in life can be screwed up by the most annoying things. A tiny flaw in the facet of a diamond can make it worthless. All the effort in the world to create the perfect machine is doomed to failure if all the components aren't themselves perfect. The perfect comic book is an even more impossible ideal, because however flawless the creation, however perfect the components, all reaction to comic books depends on a readers personal tastes.

> *YOU'RE CONSTANTLY WORKING WITH OTHER PEOPLE. THERE'S A MINIMUM OF TWO MINDS, THE WRITER AND THE PENCILLER"*

But before you all start throwing in the towel, this cynical introduction is actually a lifeline to anybody starting out in the business. It basically says that not even the greatest creators in the world can please all the people all the time. The most popular writers and artists can only ever hope to please many of the people much of the time. And that's only achieved when all the other components are working together as well.

Nick Vince tells us, "Something a comic book writer appears to have over many other writers is that you're constantly working with other people. There's a minimum of two minds, the writer and the penciller. Then there's the editor's mind as well, and the inker, the colourist, the letterer...so there's got to be a shared sense of what's going on all the time."

Most flaws and cracks occur when one or other of the components mess up – so when you're thinking about working on a comic strip, think about what has already happened and what is going to happen, not just in the story, but to the book in reality.

"A lot of artists ask for it," says Nick. "If they're given a full script and they don't sketch in where the word balloon goes, sorry buddy, but you asked for it!"

"It happens to all of us," agrees Mark Buckingham. "There always comes a point... often it's when you're reaching the flow of a sequence and you feel that visually it works far better in a certain way. Then the word balloons go down, and, suddenly – PANIC! You realise what you've actually done is successfully obscure your main character for three panels and all you've got are these shots of his bottom. How on Earth is a reader going to understand what's going on now?"

Nick again: "Captions are added in, and full script isn't foolproof. When an artist makes a decision to rejig something its very difficult because they can't afford to just look at that page. It might have ramifications 15 pages later.

"A decent writer has these thoughts in mind – he looks at it as a whole. I've had the luxury of writing full script on *Immortalis* – so if *Immortalis* is a disaster I've totally screwed myself by saying this – but I've put everything I can into it."

Mistakes will creep in at the script stage, but having spent eight hours solid intense concentration on making something the best you can, you often can't see the simple errors of illogic for the sparkling prose you've sweated blood to produce. The way to spot them is, according to Nick, "Two days without looking at it. Don't look at it at all – go away, do something else and approach it again fresh.

"The other way is long, hot baths and visualising what's going on, or just putting your head down for an hour. Or at least that's what I try to convince myself when I wake up an hour later.

"There does come a point where you've got a blank page in front of you or you've got to rewrite; your back hurts, your bum hurts, and you just have to go and lie down. When you relax you've got the images flowing in front of your eyes and they're a lot clearer and stronger; it's often there that those magic sparks that give you the key to go forward appear."

The problem with intense vision is that you can easily believe that others will see the same thing as strongly as you do,

Immortalis © *Marvel Comics*

ECT MACHINE

and you forget to mention some important elements.

AAAGH! ARTISTS!

"I've met an artist," says Nick, disgustedly, "who picks up scripts and draws page one, then reads page two and draws it, and they've not read the whole script until they're on the last page.

"I've met and worked with actors who read their lines only and know what's going on in their part of a play, but haven't the foggiest what the play is about. That can be an advantage for an actor in specialised circumstances, but it's *never* an advantage to an artist. You may find the scriptwriter has made a cock-up, but by that stage its too late and you've got to go back and rework what you've already done."

Mark: "What I've found in most of my working relationships with Nick and with Neil Gaiman, and with working with Jamie Delano, is that the best way to make sure you both get the best out of a strip is for an artist to produce thumbnail sketches for the entire book – preferably with the writer present, or alternatively seeing or faxing to the writer and discussing it thoroughly." This way you avoid the very easy problem of misinterpretation.

"It usually only takes a day to make a fairly good series of thumbnails from it, and that's not a lot of time to lose if you've made a glaring error, whereas if you've fairly accurately pencilled 24 pages and the writer sees them and says 'My God, what do you think you're doing?' and tells you that it completely messes up what happens in the next part of the book, you're buggered. Usually, by the time the artist has reached the end of the book he's also reached his deadline and there's no room to manoeuvre."

"That's one of the joys of starting off a new book in that you have the luxury of being able to phone up and say 'Do you think this is a good idea'. Pitch your ideas to your artist and see if he's happy about the way of expressing it," Nick ventures, although I imagine that there are writers who would never think of involving the artist at such an early stage.

"Going back to the first script of *Immortalis* for a moment, there are places that say 'I don't know quite how to describe this, but this is the action for the whole page and I suggest this number of panels, this is what I want to happen but I can't visualise it absolutely in my mind'. There are parts of the movie that are in soft focus, in which case you just have to be honest and say to the artist that you can't do it.

"It tends to work better because you've got the more visually gifted arm of the partnership in at the very beginning to help express what you're stumbling towards. It all goes back to being a lot of hard work and about 10% inspiration, because the rest of the time you're thinking 'I can't write, what am I doing?'. But it doesn't half give you a kick when you've done a good job."

AAAGH! EDITORS!

"One thing I should say about *Immortalis* is that I've had the minimum of editorial interference so far, which is very refreshing. I don't know whether you could get an editor to talk about how they approach that relationship, because it's very, very difficult. Writers are fragile little creatures who tend to fly off the handle. We get very hurt and our self-confidence is easily crushed – and the moment your self-confidence goes as a creator it's hell. It takes a long time to claw that back. I mean, you can only spend so much of your life saying, 'I'm wrong, this person's right,' because it dams the creative juices.

"There has to come a point where you have to be able to fail successfully, as I was taught in drama school. Every time you put pen to paper and produce a script, you're risking something, but you have to have the courage to experiment and take the dangerous ways, and reach as far as you can. It was Browning who said, 'A man's reach should exceed his grasp/ Or what's a heaven for?' You've got to go as far as you possibly can. If you don't get what you're aiming for, you've still got a lot further than you thought you were going to. You've achieved a great deal more.

> *"EVERY TIME YOU PUT PEN TO PAPER . . . YOU'RE RISKING SOMETHING"*

"To create that kind of atmosphere is very difficult for an editor. It's very difficult to be able to nurture and win the respect of creators like that. It takes a great deal of faith in the editors part, and of course, on the publishers part as well. As I say, creators can be very temperamental."

As an editor myself, I don't think it too wrong and butt in here. It's true that it takes a lot of faith in your writers; you also have to have an incredible amount of self-confidence to change someone's work and and say that the end result is better, especially when the work wasn't particularly 'wrong' in the first place; a lot of that confidence comes from being able to see the comic or magazine as a whole, to see how the intricate shapes slot together. Something as simple as changing a title, for instance, can cause friction, especially when it's the title you spent hours dreaming up that has been thoughtlessly discarded, the one that, to you, summed up the whole piece, but to the editor clashed with another similar title in the same issue.

The other problem is that editing is a job where you are as committed as any writer or artist, if you care. You spend a lot of time of the day-to-day running of the product and there's rarely time to praise the people getting it right – you're just grateful that God put them on this earth and gave you the directions to find them.

"One of the things Paul [Neary] said to me in San Diego was that he knows that every time he interferes with a good script, he's taking the brick out that's likely to bring the bridge down – and every writer knows that every brick has been put in there for a purpose, if he's doing his job properly.

"I will freely acknowledge that because of deadlines and the fact that you have to earn money, you have to turn the stuff out. It is easy to fall behind because, naturally, creators take on more projects than they can easily cope with."

That's just fear! Noone wants to put all their eggs in one basket.

"It's not always going to be like that. I'm looking forward to the day when it becomes slightly easier. All my friends assure me that it never does."

But sometimes it does, Nick, because sometimes you'll find a project where a lot of the bricks are already in place.

Immortalis #3, cover

"Yes. You know what you've done before, but then you think 'Oh shit, I'm just plagiarising myself'. I came across it at the end of a script once before: I'm sure I recreated a scene I had earlier on. I thought, 'Ah! Irony! That's fine: I'm actually juxtaposing, so there's a good reason for this'.

"Irony is a very good excuse for a lot of failure, because you can't think of another way of doing it. Sometimes there are good reasons – it's comforting."

AAAGH! DEADLINES!

"One of the nice things about *Immortalis* is that it's one of those rare occasions where both of us have reduced other workload commitments," offers Mark.

"For now, it's nice to know that I have a relatively limited amount of work that needs to be completed. I actually only need to do five pages this week, so I'll take my time, enjoy the work and put more in than I normally have time to."

Your editor almost falls off his stool at this point. Over the past two months, nobody has once mentioned that you can actually *enjoy* the work! It's the deadline ethic: you worry so much about the deadlines that you forget how enjoyable the creative process can be.

GIVE ME THE CHILD WOMAN! YOU'VE LOST CHILDREN BEFORE – BETTER IT DIE AND WE LIVE TO HAVE OTHERS
NO!
"THE IMMORTAL MAN FELT THE DEVIL'S HOT EYES, URGING HIM TO INTERFERE."
"DEMANDING HE WEIGH A CHILD'S LIFE THESE PEOPLES' SOULS, AGAINST A THOUSAND YEARS OF SUFFERING."
"HE TOLD HIMSELF THESE PEOPLE HELPED THE PRIEST HANG HIS SISTER."
HEY! WHAT KINDA STORY IS THIS?!

"ALL CREATIVE PEOPLE HAVE THEIR LITTLE CRUTCHES TO HELP THEM THROUGH THE EVERY DAY BUSINESS. . . ."

"Yeah," agrees Nick, "and because Mark and I have managed to shift other stuff, deadlines are not tight. You have this time to go away and dream and forget about it and come back to it fresh. Before you sit down in front of that piece of paper, you've done all this...research I suppose you have to call it. Finding out as much as possible, taking it all in.

"Research is the only answer to writers block that I know. If you really feel you can't write, and you're really not into it – and there are days like that – the only thing you can do is research, get something, look at as much as you can and that spark is bound to come. It's a good reason for going down the bookshop and spending money you've not got."

"I usually find the best way to shift artists block is something similar," says Mark. "I usually go for a twenty minute, half hour walk, or watch tele for an hour, and try to empty my mind."

"You have to go back to it eventually, but you *have* to take that break."

AAAGH! ME BACK!

"Part of the process of writing and drawing is that you've got your hand in the same position for a long time, and you've got to have a pen that's comfortable to work with. It takes ages to find." Nick adds an almost tearful story of losing his pen: "It's a major panic because you just can't write!"

"All creative people have their little crutches that help them get through the every day business of producing a comic strip." Careful, Mark, this is a family magazine. "With me its using a particular brush and a particular kind of ink, and a particular kind of paper, making sure there's enough natural light in the room, not straining as I work. They're only little things, but it gives you the reassurance that you need as you start work each day. You feel you're in a routine that is right for you and it will carry you through that day's work."

"We're describing them as little things, but they're not," says Nick. And after I warned them, too. "It starts as a little thing, but a pen or a chair that's uncomfortable after an hour can be a real disaster, a major headache. I had to go to the doctor once because the little finger on my hand was freezing up, and I couldn't work out why that was. I was convinced I had some sort of neurone disease, but what I'd been doing was resting my elbow on the table with my head on my hand, and trapping the nerve at the bottom of the elbow. I have to consciously think about avoiding that – I still do it, but at least I'm aware of it.

"A comfy chair, the right paper, the right pen – I can guarantee that the moment you find X, Y or Z they're no longer made any more. The company immediately goes into liquidation. So if you find something you want, order it in huge amounts."

Mark: "I find that all the materials I use involve me travelling twenty or thirty miles in order to get my hands on them, particularly Winsor and Newton series 7 brushes, and the Schoellers Hammer paper that I use, and Higgins Black Magic ink which I used to be particularly fond of using. There was only one or two shops within a thirty or forty mile radius that would ever have any in stock, and that wasn't always guaranteed. I was getting to that irritating stage of popping in and saying, 'Have you got any?' and buying everything they had."

Cultivate your local supplier, is Nick's advice. "Finding a good stationary suppliers who would deliver to my door was a godsend."

EPILOGUE

Me: "Have you ever reached a point where you've said 'I didn't know you wanted me to write like that'?"

Nick: "Sometimes. When I read the interview I did with Jamie in *Comic World* and then read the one with John Smith, I thought John's was more interesting than mine because he was more precise. I gave Jamie the broad outline about what I hoped to achieve; John was very honest about what he thought he had. If I'd seen that earlier, I'd have given a different interview."

Me: "But if I wrote a set of questions for every single writer to go out and ask, I'd end up with the same article every time. Most people have got roughly the same thing to say on a lot of subjects, so you use different interviewers with different techniques. I do most of mine in bars."

Mark: "There's always that one."

Me: "Well, at the end of the day, I presume that everyone else is being terribly professional about it, so I have to make mine different to change the tone between features. I don't necessarily want to ask...hang on, who's interviewing who here?"

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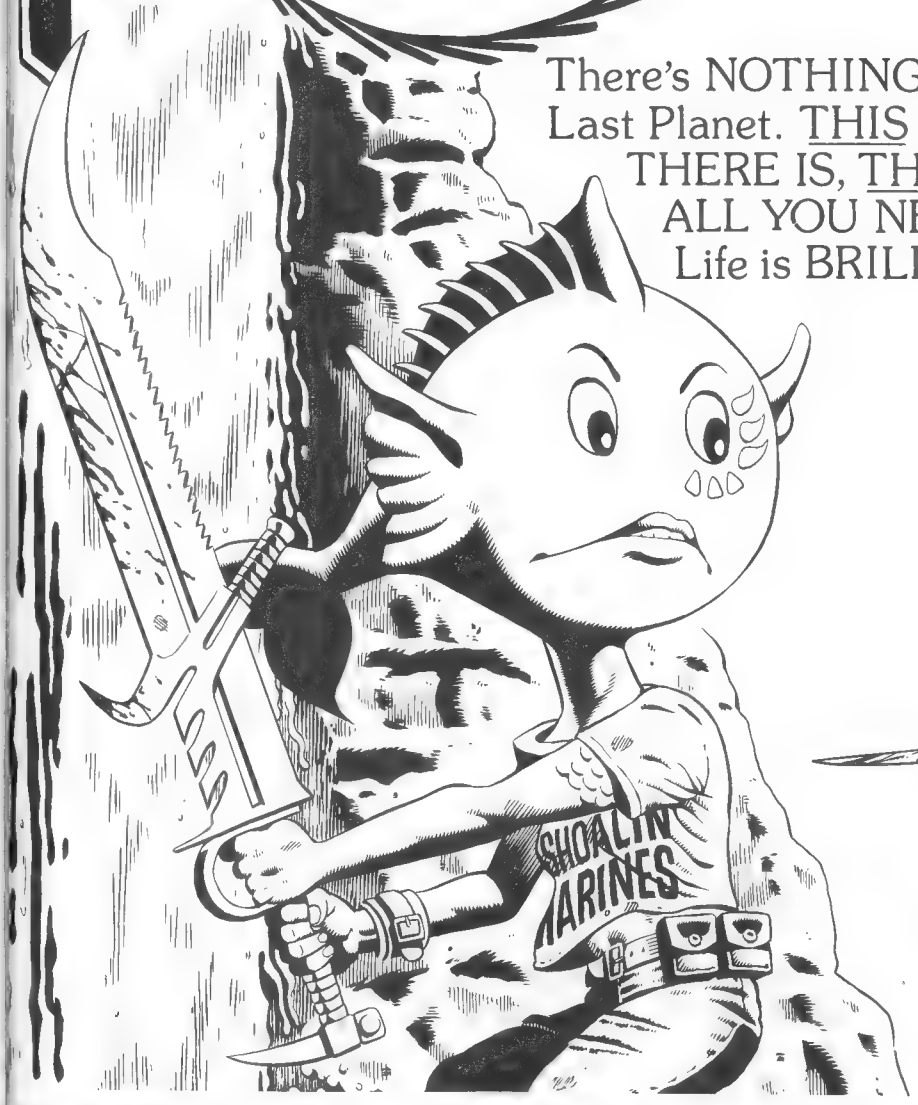

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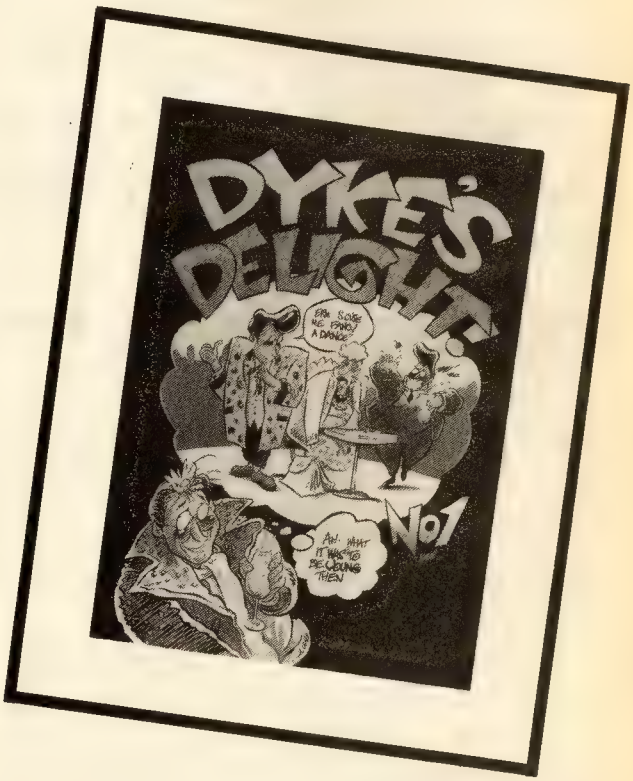

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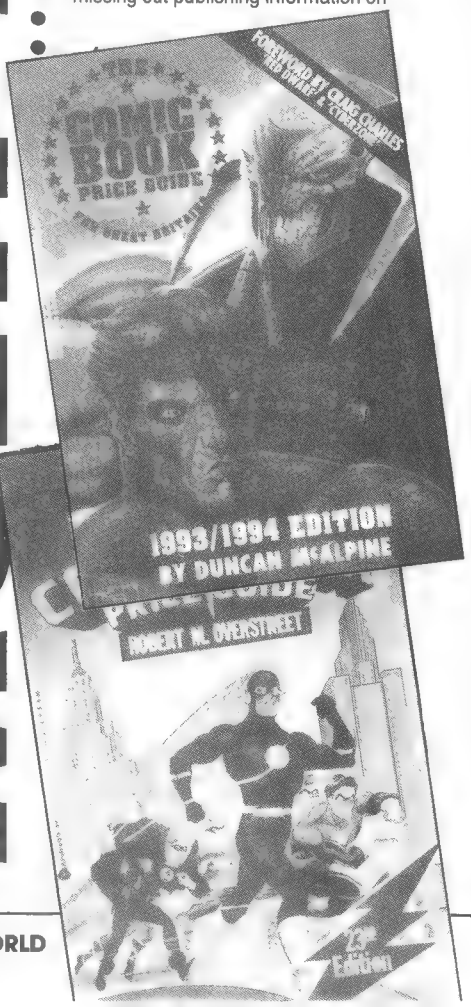
NOT QUITE COMICS

MULTI-MEDIA

I'm not going to argue the pros and cons of price guides: the same arguments exist for schools between end of term exams or continual assessment. Prices adjust throughout the year, and both* The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide *(edited by Robert Overstreet, 23rd edition, Avon, 1993) and* The Comic Book Price Guide for Great Britain *(edited by Duncan McAlpine, 5th edition, PGP, 1993) now produce updates to fill the continual assessment requirements adequately. The advantage over the monthly price guide magazines for both are their scope and the ability to step back from the month to month price jumps which can suddenly hype a comic into the stratosphere, almost inciting dealers to push the prices up.

In basic terms the Overstreet volume has the longer pedigree, the McAlpine is obviously more relevant to the British market. In outlook and scope the books make interesting comparisons: where Overstreet was comprehensive he has made a number of controversial omissions over the years (notably the decision to drop b/w comics a few years back), and the new volume is, astonishingly, smaller than last years, achieved by the annoying habit of missing out publishing information on many titles available last year and giving the rubric "Value Cover or Less". Annoying errors are bound to creep into a volume of this size (e.g. Swawn #0 by Alan Moore?), and *Wetworks* gets a listing, which – as with many price guides – makes you wonder how prices are arrived at when information is prepared before the comic is even drawn.



The McAlpine volume is, by comparison, greatly expanded, using a smaller typeface than last year, but still clearer than Overstreet. The front matter has some useful additions, a greatly expanded First Appearances index, information on hot artists and their appearances, an ongoing character appearances index; it lacks the brief biographies and the historical pieces of last year, replaced by a nonsensical squib by Ron Bennett. Entries are expanded backwards into the Golden Age on many of DC's most popular title – it was annoying to have Superman listed from #50 and *Detective Comics* from #100. Not that many people can afford them, but at least now you know how much you can't afford them by. .

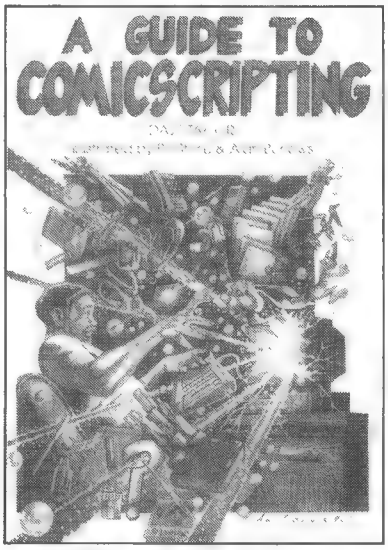
Weighed side by side the McAlpine volume is cheaper, clearer and more relevant by far, making it the volume to pick if you have to choose.

'Ultimate' is a dangerous place to start in a review, one that trips off the copywriter's tongue in the same breath as 'unbeatable bargain'. Things are very rarely ultimate; the best we have at the moment, perhaps, but the best for all time?

But if anything *feels* like ultimate it's John Clute and Peter Nicholl's **The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction** (Orbit, 1993), weighing in at 1370 pages, as thick as a brick, and twice as heavy. It would be nit-picking to dig for errors amongst the 1.2 million words (publishers estimate, I didn't count 'em); instead we have 4360 odd entries, author biographies, magazine histories, film and television reviews, and thematic essays covering Science Fiction across the globe. Critic John Clute is noted for his studious examinations of SF, sometimes over-embellished and dangerously obscure, here pared to the white bone – in places you can feel him wanting to be 'ultimate', rather than comprehensive, straining at the leash...The results are authority in manageable chunks, a balance of fact, opinion and biographical data. Brian Stableford provides some thought provoking essays, as does Nicholls himself. If it has a disadvantage over the first edition it is the loss of illustrations to break up columns of unrelenting text, and the wage-busting £45 price tag.

The comic entries, compiled in the main by Ron Tiner and Steve Whitaker are brief, touching on their subject and drawing back quickly. Of associational interest, it's the best single-volume encyclopedia on SF available, and makes a similar volume on comics all the more necessary to update Maurice Horn's gigantic effort, now 15 years old.

What both the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* and the two Price Guides prove is that there is still room for a fan press and fan publishing. Where the Clute/Nicholls can be briefly authoritative, the small press can expand dramatically; where the price guide offers selective information the small press can afford to target its subject and be comprehensive. An excellent example is the series of booklets published by Bryon Whitworth (17 Hill Street, Colne, Lancs. BB8 0DH) which index classic British comics. The latest two volumes are **The Power Pack** and **Cowboy Comics Library: An Illustrated Guide** compiled by Steve Holland (the latter in collaboration with David Ashford). *The Power Pack* lists the contents of *Wham*, *Smash*, *Pow*, *Fantastic* and *Terrific*, where many British

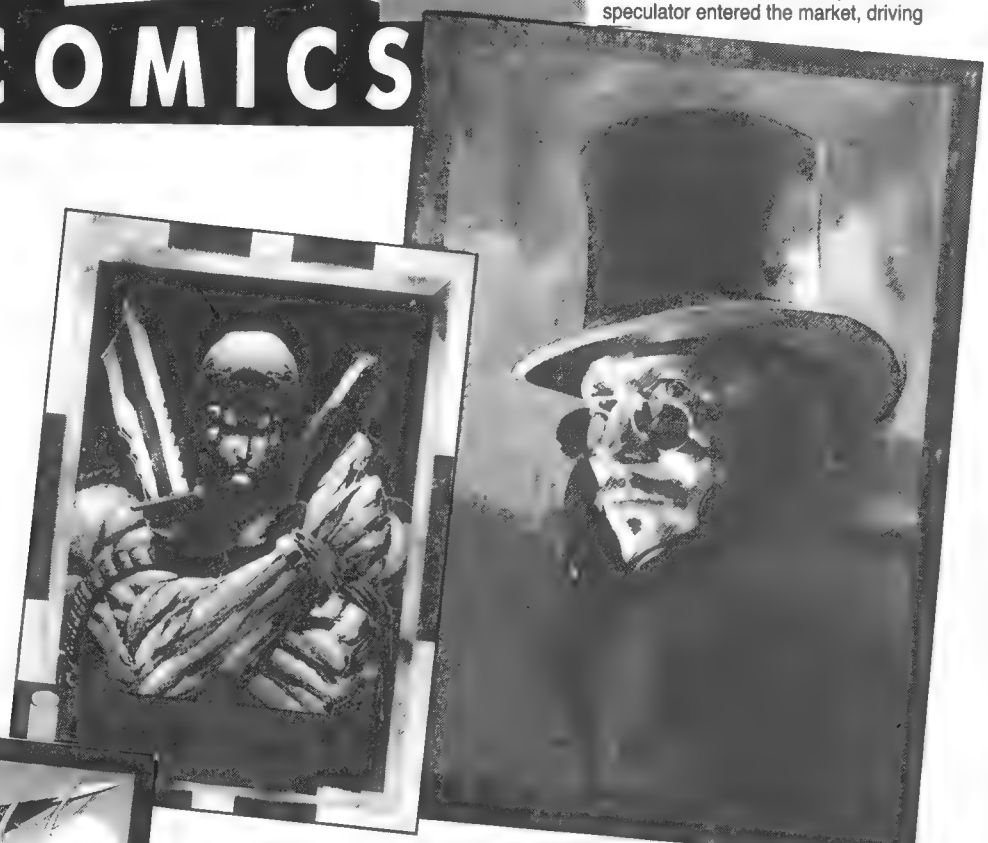


readers first caught the Marvel wave in the 1960s, through the 'Power Comics' black and white reprints. There's a lengthy introductory, anecdotal history of Odhams Press, the publishers, and the key players in the comics, followed by lists of stories and serial breakdowns. These are definitely for the dedicated fan or bibliographer, but throw up some interesting facts: did you know, for instance, that Barry Windsor Smith published his first art with *Fantastic* and *Terrific*? The disadvantages are the fact that the book is photocopied and expensive. The same comments arise from *Cowboy Comics*, introduced by Ashford: although it runs to over 300 pages the greatly reduced b/w reproduction of colour covers are hardly shown to their best advantage.

More widely interesting is **A Guide to Comicscripting** (Robert Hale, 1993) by David Taylor who has 15 years of experience to draw on. As a basic guide to the do's and don'ts of scripting it makes an entertaining read, covering the same ground as the *Comic World* masterclass series; presented as a strip cartoon, it's surprisingly clear, dipping into presentation, explaining dialogue and captions, with some common sense advice on submissions. At £9.99 it won't break the bank, and may help you on your way to the top.

Neil Cooper

CARDS & COMICS



What measures 2½ inches by 3½ inches and can be plain, embossed, foil-etched or even a hologram and costs anything from 10p to £100?

Answer – It's a Trading Card. Fine; but what has this to do with Comics?

Trading Cards trace their history back to the days of Bazooka Joe and bubble-gum chewing adolescence. Do you remember starting to buy the gum that included cards or stickers from your favourite TV show or Sports team? You bought them even if the gum tasted awful, threw the gum away and collected the cards or stickers.

Eventually they stopped selling the gum and started selling the 'free gift' cards as a product in their own right. In the UK we used to call them 'Collectors Cards' in the USA they became known as 'Trading Cards' because you traded any multiple copies with friends. British publishers and marketing men never saw the significance of what was happening in the playgrounds and the concept all but disappeared to be replaced by sticker albums. However in the USA companies such a Topps (the home of Bazooka Joe), SkyBox and others founded a multi-million dollar industry based on cards.

The roots of the trading card hobby is in American sports. Baseball cards, depicting players and their statistics became highly sought after and the idea spread to other sports such as American Football and Basketball. The hobby in the USA soon grew as large, if not larger, than the comics marketplace. Many small companies started producing cards covering even the most obscure 'sports' and the marketplace became awash with product.

As prices for rare items rose, card collecting was publicised as an inflation beating investment and the professional speculator entered the market, driving prices even higher. Doesn't this all sound familiar?

The inevitable market collapse followed, fuelled by over production and over speculation. The surviving companies looked for other markets and found Comics. Where most panel illustrations are the same proportions as a Trading Card and the artwork can be lifted over at minimum cost. The switch to Comics based cards also brought over an existing audience and distribution network. Comics card art is now invariably specially commissioned and few sets lift art straight from the Comics panels (The Image Comics sets from Comic Images being the exception.)

The ratio of sports to non-sports cards is now 1 to 3, with Comics related cards accounting for around 30% of the market.

Comics trading cards feature either characters, teams, events or the work of particular artists. An example of sets currently on sale include, Ghost Rider, Hulk, Marvel Universe (now on its fourth series), X-Men (on their second series), DC Bloodlines, DC Cosmic Teams, Superman: Doomsday, Milestone: The Dakota Universe, Savage Dragon, Shadowhawk etc.

Cards can be bought as packs, containing around 10 cards, boxes with around 40 packs per box or cases with around 10 boxes per case. Usually a box is enough for you to be able to make up an average set (approx. 100 cards) but not find all the special 'chase cards', while a case may give you all the 'chase cards' as well as multiple sets.

'Chase cards' are the premium collectable of the trading card market. They are special limited sub-sets in addition to the main set. They are usually marked by a higher production value, such as glossy stock card or a gimmick. The popular gimmicks include prism backgrounds, foil etching, embossing or even holograms. As with comics there are also retailers premiums and magazine give-aways which also reach the collectors market. Chase cards can be very expensive to buy singularly but it does save hunting through several boxes worth of cards. Obviously price is a reflection of scarcity and demand.

It is well worth shopping around for cards as not many comics dealers have a feel for the card market place and prices vary widely. There isn't as yet an 'Official' Trading Card Price Guide – but give it time. Most dealers will only sell complete sets or individual chase cards so completing a set can be frustrating. There are, however, a few dealers who sell individual cards or will fill a wants list.

There is a bewildering array of storage accessories available to protect the cards. The most popular being clear plastic snap-lock boxes in various sizes holding from 10 to 100 cards. The problem being that if you want to view the cards you need to open the box and handle the cards.

Equally plastic sleeves are available which hold about nine cards and can be stored in standard ring binders, while this method takes up more space it means that each individual card can be viewed without handling.

This cross over between comics and cards has led to a cross fertilisation of market places with comics collectors turning to cards and card collectors turning to comics. As a consequence the marketing strategy of including trading cards with comics has now become standard practice. The phrase 'polybagged with a card' is becoming common with no fewer than 33 comics and magazines solicited this month (June) with a trading card included. Some trading cards are now only available by buying particular comics, notably those from Topps who are the first trading card company to produce a line of comics.

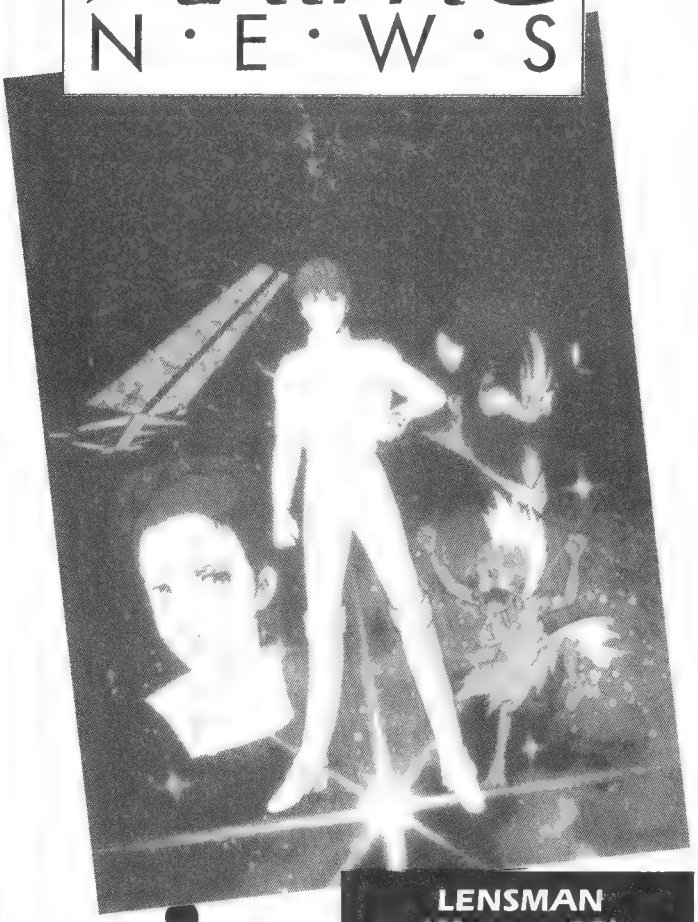
More comics publishers are forging relationships with trading card companies often creating anomalous situations such as DC Trading Cards being advertised in Marvel Comics. The licensing of characters to different trading card companies has also lead to situations such as Batman being handled by one company and the rest of the DC universe by another. If you compare the Superman: Doomsday cards with the related comics, you will see that in certain scenes Batman has been edited off the cards and replaced by Captain Marvel.

Perhaps the ultimate relationship between cards and comics has been reached with the launch of Jim Shooter's new Defiant line of comics. The first issue of which, Plasm #0, is being initially released only in trading card format. When the cards are placed in the special binder it reads like a comic.

Where will it all lead? Will the only way to buy comics in the future be when they are given away free with a pack of trading cards?

Alan J. Porter

Animé N·E·W·S



LENSMAN (Manga, 18)

An enjoyable if undistinguished space opera, **Lensman** is loosely – very loosely – based on the classic science fiction series by E.E. 'Doc' Smith published in the 1940s. Kimball Kinnison, a young farmer, finds a crashed spaceship and is given a lens which melds onto his hand; the lens is a device linking many different alien species, although little is made of the vast background Smith developed, a universal struggle between galaxy spanning races since the beginning of time.

Everything from an alien rave, to exploding planets follows, with Kimball playing Luke Skywalker to female lead Clarissa MacDougall's Princess Leia, with oversized Tregonsee doing a passable Chewbaca. From the addition of the farming background and the cute R2D2-like robot at the beginning to the sight of the defeated Boskone leader spinning away into the universe at the end...we are treated to an anime rerun of *Star Wars* as Kinnison tries to deliver a message held in the lens to the Galactic Patrol, hopping from planet to planet just ahead of the evil Boscones.

The effects, particularly the computer graphics, are spot on, the animation classy, and if you ignore the overtures to Luke & Co. you can sit back and enjoy an hour and three quarter space romp.

Richard Hudson

VAMPIRE HUNTER D (Manga, 18)

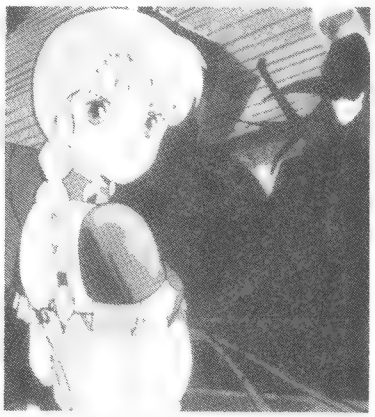
Two things astound me about this movie: I didn't realise the vampire legend had reached as far as Japan, but then maybe that's just me begin ignorant; and this has an 18 certificate. Why? Beats the Hell outta me. I can only presume it's because, for brief seconds, the heroine of the story, the unlikely-named Doris, appears naked in a shower. There's no real reason for this except that in the next scene the mysterious Vampire Hunter known only as 'D' has to resist the impulse to become even more emotionally attached to this peasant girl who has hired him to kill the evil Count Magnus Lee, a 10,000 year old vampire who has selected the girl as his next human wife. The censors, it seems, are not big on cartoon characters appearing nude. Oh well.

All this takes place in 10,000 years time when the planet has been reduced to a feudal state and is beset by vampires. Being Japanese, no explanation for this unfortunate turn of events is offered, but let's just take it as read. So Doris is picked out by the Count and infected. She is to be married to the ancient vampire despite the objections of his much miffed daughter, frightened that their noble bloodline should be contaminated by human blood. Human blood, apparently, is for drinking not for mating. They descended from Count Dracula, the original vampire, and are therefore not just any old riff-raff vampire lot.

Into this scenario comes D, who looks like The Shadow and has the pared-down dialogue of Clint Eastwood's Man With No Name. He also has a cyborg horse and some extraordinary powers. These, it seems, come as a result of him also being related to Dracula. But he's on a quest to wipe out the scourge of vampires from the Earth. Naturally he falls for Doris and battle is commenced with the Count and his fairly unpleasant collection of monsters, ghouls and vampire-types.

All this is fun. It comes from the same guy, Toyoo Ashida, who gave you the brutal *Fist of the North Star*. This isn't as unremittingly violent, but it does have more of a storyline. The graphics are pretty good and the monsters are cool, especially the delicious three sisters. In short, it's fine entertainment and worth 80 minutes of your time. Just a shame it's got stuck with an 18. Ho hum.

Dave Dickson



NEWS

The success of the Birmingham Japanese Animation convention last year has spawned **Contanimated 1993**, to be held between Friday 22 and Sunday 24 October at the New Cobden Hotel. The programme promised includes two continuous video shows, screening much material never seen before, plus a third part-time video show along with non-video program items, dealers rooms, an art show, panels, discussions, a games room and demonstrations of anime derived video games.

Membership costs £20 before October 15, and £25 thereafter (£15 per day on the door). Enquiries should be addressed with an SAE to Contaminated, J.J. Green, 9 Edmund Street, Swindon, Wilts. or telephone 0793 644 169. Because some of the film material is designated 18, membership cannot be accepted under the age of 14, and anyone between 14-18 must be accompanied by an adult who will be legally responsible for you.

Manga Video, pleased with the success of *Vampire Hunter D* which entered the video charts at #9 in May (it was the second highest film release, behind *Wayne's World*), have lined up an increased schedule for the rest of the year. June releases are **Lensman** and **Urotsukidoji II: Legend of the Demon Womb**. July 5th releases are **The Heroic Legend of Arislan Pt.1**, set in the year 320 of the Palese era, when the imperial lands are invaded by the army of Lusitania, led by the mysterious Silver Mask, and the fate of the lands depends on the 14-year old Arislan, son of the King. **RG Veda Pt.1 & 2** is the other July release, in which the evil Teishakuten seizes the throne of a nation, and only six warriors have the power to join forces and defeat him. Yasha leads the search, only to find his own village massacred - a trap set by Teishakuten. August releases are **Crying Freeman Pt.1** and **Doomed Megalopolis**. Further ahead we can expect **Cyber City Oedo 808**, **Ultimate Teacher** and **Bubblegum Crash**.

UROTSUKIDOJI II: LEGEND OF THE DEMON WOMB (Manga, 18)

This is the strongest adult Anime released so far by Manga, although I'm sure readers of *Comic World* will be able to send in worse. Although this is a sequel to *Legend of the Overfiend*, the plot almost ignores the devastation of the earlier film and switches attention to the arrival of Takeaki, cousin of Nagumo, the clumsy kid who turned out to be the Overfiend, and almost certainly the chosen one (the Chojin) who will unite the Three Worlds of Humans, Beasts and Demons.

Director Hideki Takayama throws in a diabolical nazi/mad scientist prologue about raising demons-for-Hitler during the war using a giant, piston-driven screwing machine; in the present, the son of the scientist, Myunhi Hausen, becomes the nasty of the piece, raising a demon to kill the Overfiend.

As Takeaki and his family fly in to see Nagumo, the plane is attacked, the young boy being the only survivor, after a blood transfusion from Nagumo; it turns him into a demon.

The plot begins to race: Under Myunhi's control Takeaki becomes first a serial killer and is then sent against Nagumo. The eternal question is, will his family love for Nagumo give him the strength to fight back? The rest of the film is intercut with Barbi-doll sex, especially that Anime favourite, young girls being screwed by monsters. It's not a rocks-off film, soft-core at its hardest, so don't buy it for the sex. The plot and animation carry the film to a logical if unsurprising climax, with some moments of genuine horror.

Rick Vance

Batman animated: the movie

The animated Batman series, which has been seen on both American and British Saturday morning TV since its debut in the autumn of 1992, will appear as a full-length feature film: **Batman: The Animated Movie**. The film will be released on Christmas Day by Warner Brothers, who own Batman publishers DC Comics.

The film is co-produced by Alan Burnett, Eric Radomski & Bruce Timm, and higher quality computer-generated animation is promised, a first for Warners, using Dong Yang Animation studio in Korea and Spectrum Animation in Japan. Written by Alan Burnett, Paul Dini, Martin Pasko & Michael Reaves, the film will introduce a new villain to the Batman canon, Phantasm, and offers a glimpse into Bruce Wayne's past and his first love. Continuing their association from the TV series, Kevin Conroy provides the voice for the Dark Knight, Efrem Zimbalist Jr. plays Alfred, and Mark Hamill plays the Joker; newcomers will include Dana Delany, Salvator Valestra, Hart Bochner and Stacy Keach Jr.

The TV series will be continued in the autumn 1993 schedule, having raised Fox's weekday performance amongst 2-11 year-olds by 32%, overtaking previous leaders CBS in the latest season.

US NEWSBRIEF
CONTINUED

RUBBER BLANKET

Dave Mazzucchelli's annual **Rubber Blanket** anthology features 'Big Man' and 'The Death of Monsieur Absurd' by Mazzucchelli, plus contributions by Ted Stearn, David Hornung & Francesca Ghermandi.

TOPPS COMICS

Jason Goes to Hell #1 is resolicited from earlier this year, subtitled 'Friday the 13th Part IX', polybagged with three trading cards, as are all Topps comics.

Two issues of **Jurassic Park** are solicited this month, both containing a coupon for a chance to win one of 500 limited, numbered amberchrome cover versions, the #1 edition being signed by the creators and all the staff at Topps. Topps also release their *Jurassic Park* trading cards this month.

More film adaptation action can be found in **The Last Action Hero #2**. Amongst the trading cards is one by Dave Dorman.

Satan's Six, one of the first of Jack Kirby's 'Secret City Saga' comes to a close with #4, which guest stars Jason (yep, that Jason) and offers a preview of Kirby's August-release creations, **Teenagents**. Over in **Secret City Saga #3** there's a chance to win copies of a limited edition Vice President Gore hologram card.

TRIUMPHANT

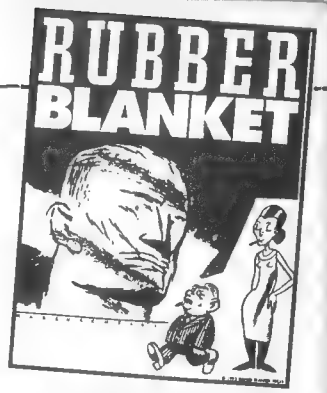
A new entry for the summer overloa, advertising themselves as 'The Collector's Universe', Triumphant Comics introduce the Triumphant Universe with the first issue of **Scavengers** which introduce a group a space-faring junkmen aboard the S.S. Journeyman, captained by Ximos. Investigating an abandoned spaceship, the crew are attacked by an alien. Written by newcomer Jarrod Post, with art by Franchesco & Michael Halbleib.

This and future issues contain two coupons, one (of 8) for a copy of **Scavengers #0**, the other (of 9) for a copy of **Triumphant Unleashed #0**. All Triumphant comics will be serially numbered.

TUNDRA

The Maximortal #6 continues Rick Veitch's exploration of superheroics, and follows the creation of a Senate hearing on the adverse effects on comics.

Soon after its appearance in *Heavy Metal War Machine* comes the collected **War Machine** by Dave Gibbons & Will Simpson, better known as Rogue Trooper to us, as a hardcover, 80-pager, priced $14.95.



VALIANT

The two biggies are the *Deathmate* colour editions **Deathmate Blue** and **Deathmate Yellow**, issued alongside the *Black* and *Red* editions from Image this month. In *Blue*, John Ostrander provides chapter one, 'Magnus/Battlestone', Joe St. Pierre, Sean Chen & Kathryn Bolinger produce chapter two, 'Livewire/Stonghold/Striker/Impact', chapter three is 'Harbinger/ Brigade' by Maurice Fontenot & Howard Simpson, and chapter four, 'Solar/Supreme' is by Kevin Van Hook & Peter Grau. In *Yellow* it's a further four chapters: 'Ivar & Armstrong' by Mike Baron, Bernard Chang & Rodney Ramos, 'H.A.R.D.C.A.T.S.' by David Micheline & Mike Leeke, 'Ninjak/ Zealot' by Jorge Gonzalez & Don Perlin, and 'Shadowman/Grifter' by Bob Hall.

In the regular titles, Archer & Armstrong guest in **Harbinger #22** and **Shadowman #18**, the Eternal Warrior and Magnus attack a slave labour camp in **Magnus: Robot Fighter #29**, and **Secret Weapons #2** is the third and final part of 'The Coming of the Darque Age'.

The Valiant Reader – A Guide to the Valiant Universe is a 32-page, 75¢ introduction to the Valiant universe. And the **Valiant Era Trading Cards Series** from Upper Box is a 120 card set providing background information on every Valiant title published to date; two sub-sets to search for, a 10-card 'First Appearances' set, and 10 titled 'Unseen Art', plus a singe super-rare Joe Quesada chase card. See our feature on Valiant in this very issue for more information.

VORTEX

Howard Chaykin's *Black Kiss* erotic series is collected as a graphic novel, priced $8.95 for 138 pages under the title **Thick Black Kiss**.

WARP GRAPHICS

The long-running Elfquest saga expands as Richard Pini & Janine Johnson begin to adapt stories from the Elfquest novels series published by Tor. **Elfquest: Blood of Ten Chiefs #1** debuts in July alongside the **Elfquest: New Blood 1993 Summer Special** edited by Richard and Wendy Pini, a 64 page special.

reviews

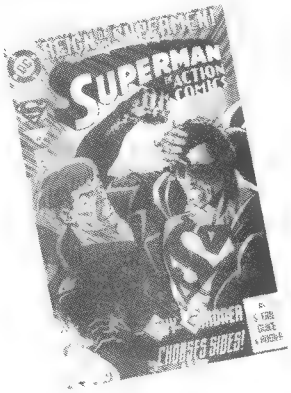
KNIGHTFALL & REIGN OF THE SUPERMEN

I've always thought the difference between a myth and a legend was simple semantics, that myth was based in fantasy and legend could be based in truth – wrong according to my dictionary which says legend has more to do with tradition than reality. How, then, to differentiate between Superman and Batman?

Superman is the dream of flying, to have alien strength and an impervious body, to be so powerful as to never know fear; he is American power-fantasy myth. Batman was the human whose physical and mental strength could carry them beyond any limits of normal man, his single-minded protection of 'his' city is the American legend. In a country without history, the two have become self-made myths, surrogate legends, apocrypha loaded with wish-fulfilment; to believe in them is to suspend logic.

For fifty years the two have reigned supreme over American comic books, only in the recent climate for harsher, darker heroes have their traditions been challenged, and the response has been to make some major changes.

Knightfall began in **Batman 492** with thirty of Gotham's more dangerous lunatics running free, and has run through the pages of **Batman** and **Detective Comics**, reaching part 10 as I write this. The story, with its predetermined shock ending, has lived up to expectations: Bruce Wayne has pushed himself beyond endurance, collapsed more than once but has always found the strength to fight back against the odds. Perhaps more than anything it has proved the limits of Batman – not his physical limits which have been effectively explored, but the acute limits of the whole Dark Knight legend itself: how many more times can he whip something out of his bat-belt to save life and limb, how many more times can he *just* grab the parapet by his fingertips. Perhaps the Batman has become stale in its endless regurgitation of plot devices, carried more by the ingenious super villains created by his writers to liven up the proceedings.



The 'Knightfall' storyline has been a technical masterpiece, the plot tightly welding the two titles, both Doug Moench and Chuck Dixon taking the opportunity to leave the other the task of getting Bruce out of various impossible situations. Individual sequences tend not to stand-out, with perhaps Dixon's Ventriloquist offering the only light relief from the unrelenting pace. The appearance of Bane at the end of the part 10, **Batman 663**, is startling, and will lift the story which, read in one sitting, was becoming a challenge, despite every effort to make this a milestone in Batman storytelling. There are only so many ways of pitting men against each other.

DC have taken a brave step in introducing an ultimate villain: Bane's motives for wanting to smash Batman are as senseless as every other criminals and seem to boil down to 'Because he's there'. At least he's got the idea that stomping him into the ground is a better way to defeat him than some Heath Robinson contraption. The outcome may be a foregone conclusion, but it will be an interesting fight, the irresistible force against the immovable object.

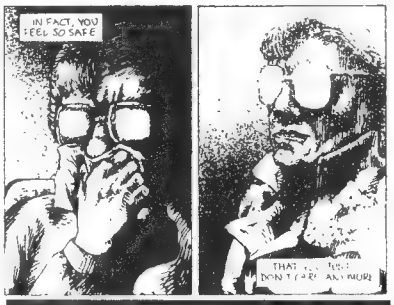
Reign of the Supermen has gone to another extreme of losing the traditional Superman, Clark Kent, and offering four different heroes in his place. After the tearjerking **Adventures of Superman #500**, as cloying as any Lassie movie, a quartet of grim substitutes moved in to fill the space left by the ultimate patriot, an alien as American as the Stars and Stripes.

Somehow none of them quite click as Superman. Superman will always be the quick-change-in-the-telephone-kiosk, stumbling, clumsy Clark Kent. It isn't the super-strong, Iron Man-meets-Thor known as Henry Johnson as depicted in the new **Man of Steel**, or the smart-ass clone of **The Adventures of Superman**, or the Terminator-cyborg of **Superman**; nor is it the discorporate alien force that touched Superman's cape in **Action Comics**, although he, or it, might just be...

But they're not Clark! With Batman you feel that anybody could don the cape, and with the right angst could fight crime in Gotham. From the moment Bruce Wayne said "I shall become a bat" he lost any identity other than grim avenger, but so many Superman stories involved the more human side of Clark Kent that only Clark, with his blind allegiance to the flag and embodiment of the American Dream could don the red and blue uniform with any credibility.

The Last Son of Krypton. The Dark Knight. Myths and legends.

Neil Cooper



TALKING TO LEONARD 1

by Richard Middleton,
Flat 1, 61 Ditton Road, Surbiton,
Surrey KT6 6RF, 25pp, £1.75.

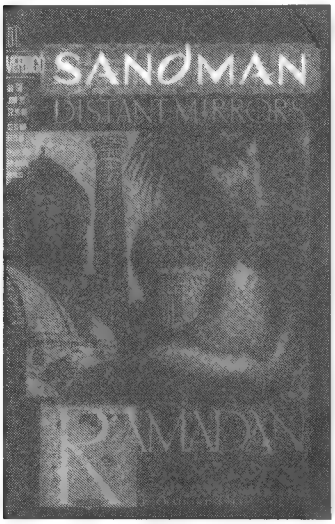
Talking to her husband Len, for Richard Middleton's anonymous dinner lady heroine, is like talking to a brick wall. In fact, that's what she might as well do. And Len has built the wall, in the cellar, so she talks to it, and watches it, and kisses it, and ultimately paints it, ten times over.

Middleton's unnerving subterranean monologue, menacingly blotted and shaded, goes deeper into love and fear and the knife's edge between them than you'd ever think possible in two dozen pages. While what she's doing looks like madness, Len's wife is actually coming to her senses, her grievances and hunger for vengeance taking shape in her chunky silhouette. Things are opening up, down there in the dark.

(Colin Greenland)

SHORT REVIEWS

Long ago, as **The Sandman 50** (Vertigo, $2.95) so beautifully reminds us, Baghdad was the city of peace – the heart of a sprawling civilisation and a symbol of all that Man could aspire to. While P. Craig Russell's graceful artwork swoops and glides through the streets of the city and their legends, Neil Gaiman's tale returns us to the days when storytelling was every child's window on the world outside. He reminds us that Baghdad stands now as a monument to the brutality that afflicts our world and our culture.

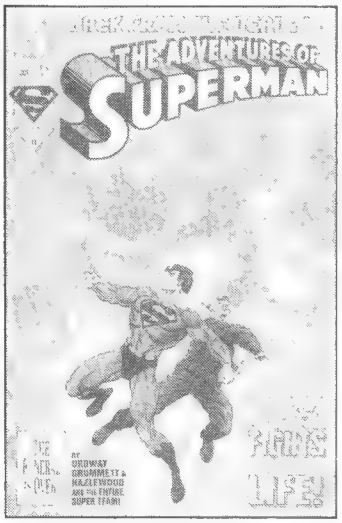


In our stories today, violence tramples over so much else – love, gentleness laughter – that the stories of tradition are vanishing altogether. There are two non-stories for the price of one in **Youngblood: Strikefile 1** (Image, $2.50); Jae Lee's striking page designs showcase vacuous illustrations that neatly avoid revealing anythng except that some people appear to be really ticked off. Rob Liefeld's flip-side is a parade of pin-ups empty of resonance or significance, until the plot splurts out BLEURGHH in the final two pages: reading this comic is like having constipation. Has Liefeld's work improved since last year's *Youngblood 1*? Not even a heavy bribe of Hob Nobs would make me read that one again, so it's difficult to say, but his action scenes are wholly lacking in impact. His anatomy and compositions are consistently weak (and at times surreal), and he doesn't even bother to keep simple details on costumes the same from page to page. I know most artists have to find a compromise between producing their best work and meeting deadlines – if you want your comics monthly they're not going to be perfect – but that doesn't begin to excuse the sheer laziness foisted upon us here.

Pretty colours though.

After Superman fell into the same trough of mindlessness in his death issue, it's a relief to find the character back on track for the beginning of his rebirth in **The Adventures Of Superman 500** (DC, $2.50, or more with a gimmick cover and bag). The Superman quartet's strength has been its avoidance of the macho excesses of many super-hero comics, in favour of more positive themes such as Superman finding strength from his extended family's support, and the continuing use of mythological riffs to define the character.

A perhaps less famous hero also returns after some time away in **The Tick 12** (New England, $2.75). Lampooning the classic archetype that started with Batman, this issue introduces the Tick Cave. Artist and writer Ben Edlund obvously enjoys himself, but the effort spent parodying a genre whose roots lie in absurdity might have been used more effectively. *The Tick* is an amiable enough read, but doesn't really take



off until Edlund unleashes the more bizarre, and more convincing, side of his humour.

You don't think the superhero genre is inherently stupid, huh? Read **Ravage 2099** (Marvel, $1.25) lately? In this seventh issue, Stan Lee's red-haired scar-faced title character who looks nothing like John Ostrander's Grimjack faces the underwater evil that is Dragonklaw. For the characters, the whole adventure is a lark; their credo in times of danger is, "Don't panic – a *deus ex machina*'ll be along in a minute." The futuristic slang Ravage employs while explaining the plot to anyone who'll listen is a delightful feast of naffness: cut adrift from Jack Kirby, the more essential component of a fondly-remembered double act, Lee's writing here is every bit as poignant as the sight of Ernie Wise appearing in panto.

In **Law Dog 1** (Epic, $2.50), which is also nothing like *Grimjack*, Flint Henry draws the adventures of an anti-hero from a place where dimensions merge. Without wanting to dismiss the contribution of Chuck Dixon on script, Henry is the lead guitar of this comic, and he's turned it right up to eleven. Technically, his drawing may frequently be all over the

place, but its gutsiness and flair more than compensates. Dixon's supporting dialogue is equally lively, and he obligingly includes scenes such as the dream sequence which gives Henry the chance to go berserk on a double-page spread crammed with hardware and explosions – every comic artist's favourite things to draw. Apart from dinosaurs . . . guns . . . girls. . . .

And Aliens. Those pesky phallus-headed xenomorphs are back in **Aliens: Rogue 1** (Dark Horse, $2.50), and Will Simpson is patently glad to be here drawing them. This is the same guy who did those *Hellblazers*? Ian Edginton's story cannily mirrors

the real life predicament of the Alien; where once it was our worst possible nightmare, nowadays we accept it into our lives without a thought. Hopefully, these creatures are not destined to remain domesticated for too much longer. Meanwhile, Edge is a very lovely man and I hate it when everyone keeps spelling his name wrong.

Other names, like McFarlane and Lee, may be prominent within the industry at the moment, but what of those artists who dominated the headlines a few years ago? At one point, John Byrne was writing and drawing the two best-selling titles in the U.S.A. behind *X-Men*. His star diminished in time, but he still enjoys a loyal following. **John Byrne's Next Men** (Dark Horse, $2.50) is a lucid example of is clear, punchy art style, but where once his writing was similarly to-the-point, it is now unfocussed – a succession of sub-plots. The sort of definition he lends his drawings could be usefully applied to his stories.

(Richard Hill)

Review copies courtesy of Birmingham's Fantastic Store (Telephone 021-643 3667) – so long, Simon, have a good trip. Prices are quoted in dollars; the sterling rate may vary from shop to shop.

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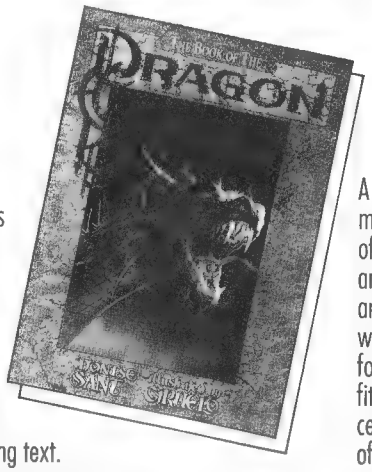

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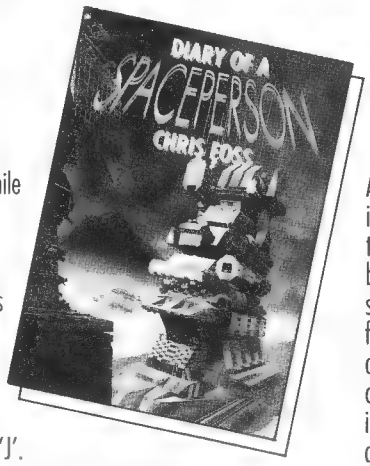

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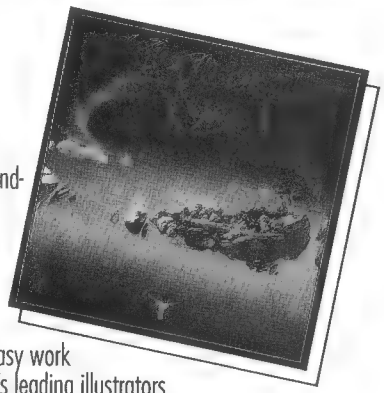

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N.M.	Nearly Mint
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F.N.	Fine
V.G.	Very Good
G.	Good
F.	Fair
P.	Poor
B.S.	Bookshop Stamp on Cover
T.S.	Taped Spine
R.S.	Rolled Spine
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